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SERMONS

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS,

AND

The most USEFUL POINTS of

DIVINITY.

BY

WILLIAM LANGHORNE, M.A.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
Printed for EDWARD and CHARLES DILLY,
in the Poultry.
MDCCLXXIII.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THESE plain and useful Discourses were intended by their learned Author for the Press. They are the more valuable, because they are simple and sincere; and as such, they are a Picture of the Writer's Mind. What he wrote, he believed; and what he believed, he practised.

J. L.

LONDON,
December 1, 1772.

CONTENTS
OF THE
FIRST VOLUME.

SERMON I.

A true Estimate of the Christian Salvation.

HEBREWS ii. 3.

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? Page 1.

SERMON II.

The Danger of delaying Repentance.

JOHN ix. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work. P. 14.

SERMON III.

Thoughts on the Delay of temporal Punishments.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. P. 32.

SER-

SERMON IV.

The final and immediate Miſeries of Wickedneſs.

ISAIAH lvii. 20, 21.

The wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt. There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked. P. 45.

SERMON V.

On the Expediency and Neceſſity of Self-Knowledge.

PSALM iv. 4.

Commune with your own heart. P. 58.

SERMON VI.

The Neceſſity of Religious Reflection.

HAGGAI i. 7.

Thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, Conſider your ways. P. 73.

SER-

SERMON VII.

The Vanity of worldly Things, a ſtrong Motive for repoſing our Hopes on Divine Providence.

PSALM xxxix. 6, 7.

Surely every man walketh in a vain ſhew: ſurely they are diſquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who ſhall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. P. 89.

SERMON VIII.

Religious Wiſdom the beſt Acquiſition.

PROVERBS iv. 7.

Wiſdom is the principal thing; therefore get wiſdom, and with all thy getting, get underſtanding. P. 105.

SERMON IX.

The Reaſonableneſs of Rejoicing in Religion.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I ſay, Rejoice. P. 120.

SER-

SERMON X.

On Submiſſion to the Supreme Being.

JAMES iv. 7.

Submit yourſelves therefore to God. P. 135.

SERMON XI.

On the Worſhip of God.

JOHN iv. 24.

God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth. P. 160.

SERMON XII.

On the Divine Goodneſs.

PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. P. 184.

SERMON XIII.

On the Divine Goodneſs in the Remiſſion of Sin.

PSALM xxv. 11.

For thy name's ſake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great. P. 202.

SER-

SERMON XIV.

Thoughts on the Christian Redemption.

TITUS ii. 14.

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. P. 214.

SERMON XV.

The Qualities of Christ as Mediator and Redeemer.

COLOSSIANS i. 14.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. P. 227.

SERMON XVI.

On the Death of Christ.

JOHN xix. 30.

It is finished! P. 243.

SER-

SERMON I.

A true Eſtimate of the Chriſtian Salvation.

HEBREWS ii. 3.

How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?

BY ſalvation in the Old Teſtament is meant a deliverance from any great temporal evil or danger; and the promiſes and threatnings of that diſpenſation relating chiefly to the good or bad events of this life, made the Jews expect, that the Meſſiah ſhould be a great conqueror, ſuch as Moſes or Joſhua, only of much more diſtinguiſhed power and magnificence than they; who ſhould free them from the Roman yoke, and extend their dominion over the gentile world. Theſe views of earthly ſplendor, this miſtaken ambition, hindered them from acknowledging the characters of

the true Meſſiah, which were ſo fully and clearly diſplayed in the Redeemer.

Was he not then as great a deliverer, as glorious a ſaviour as they expected? Yes, much more ſo. The ſalvation he has purchaſed for us, defends us from much ſtronger and more dangerous enemies, from the tyranny of ſin and ſatan, the encroachment of ſpiritual and eternal evils; it reſcues us from the ſlavery of corruption and death, and brings us into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God.

The ſalvation mentioned in the text, imports, by an eaſy figure, the doctrine of ſalvation, or the goſpel of Chriſt; this is plain from what follows, "How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation," viz. the holy goſpel; "which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?"

The apoſtle exhorts the Hebrew converts to a firm adherence to the chriſtian religion, and

and a ſincere obedience to its precepts, by two conſiderations. One, is the ſuperior dignity of its author; the law was given only by the miniſtry of angels, who, though beings of eminent endowments and power, ſtill were but creatures; yet "the word ſpoken by them was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion, and diſobedience, received a juſt recompence of reward: we ought therefore to give the more earneſt heed to the things we have heard, leſt at any time we let them eſcape us," either in regard to faith or practice, ſince they are revealed to us by a more excellent mediator, even by the Son of God himſelf; who knoweth all the ſecrets of his Father's counſels, whoſe wiſdom and goodneſs are infinite, who would uſe the laſt and moſt powerful efforts for the good and happineſs of mankind; for when God hath ſpoken to us by his Son, there remains not a meſſenger of greater authority to be ſent after him.

If men will ever receive a religion with reverence, if they will ever obſerve its dictates with an awful care, it muſt be

that which Chriſt eſtabliſhed; if there be a lawgiver whom they will love and fear, it muſt be he that is willing to ſave, and able to deſtroy; if there be any thing that can move their ſtubborn hearts and ſoften them into virtue, it muſt be a regard for Him, who is not only our almighty governor now, but will hereafter be our righteous judge.

The other conſideration, is the greatneſs of the ſalvation that Chriſt hath procured us, whoſe value being immenſe, and the encouragements to attain it moſt animating, we ſhall be utterly inexcuſable if we neglect it. Theſe I beg leave to enforce by a particular explication.

Indeed, if we deſpiſe the riches of this grace, if we weary out the long-ſuffering of God in Chriſt, what chance can there poſſibly be for us to eſcape? Is there any other Redeemer to whom we can fly for ſuccour? Can any more powerful name under the ſun be given by which we can be ſaved? Nay, is there in heaven itſelf any far-

farther remedy to be applied to our wretched caſe? Our heavenly Father ſent his ſervants the prophets to warn the world to repent, "to ceaſe to do evil, and learn to do well;" but they regarded not the voice of their fellow-creatures.—He ſent the exalted miniſters of his court, perſons of the angelic orders, who ſtood before him and heard his wiſdom, to inſtruct them in a preparative inſtitution, and to deliver his divine commandments upon mount Sinai, while it burned with fire, was filled with the ſound of the trumpet, and ſurrounded with blackneſs and darkneſs and tempeſt; but this ſcene of aſtoniſhment was ſoon forgotten, the people quickly revolted, and withdrew their allegiance from God. Laſt of all, he ſent his well-beloved Son, but in milder glory, without thoſe circumſtances of terror, and in condeſcenſion to our infirmities cloathed with fleſh and blood; he "being the brightneſs of his Father's glory, the expreſs image of his perſon, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himſelf purged our ſins, ſat down on the right hand of

the Majeſty on high." The higheſt ſtep in the ſcale of the divine compaſſion is now reached; ſurely we ſhall reverence the Son. Otherwiſe, God will miſerably deſtroy thoſe wicked men that diſobey him: there remains no farther reſource of mercy, there is no ſaviour in reſerve, no ſecond ſtate of probation.

God cannot do more for his vineyard than he hath already done; he hath watered it not only with the blood of his prophets and martyrs, but with that of his Son: if it ſtill be unfruitful, what is left for it but a ſentence of exciſion, that it be cut down and caſt into the fire? The ground that is ungrateful to the faireſt culture, that after all the pains beſtowed upon it, beareth thorns and briars, is rejected and nigh unto curſing. "How then ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?"

The ſalvation that Chriſt has purchaſed for us is not an immunity from the temporary evils of an Egyptian bondage; it is

not the procuring us an earthly Canaan, "a land flowing with milk and honey;" it is not the defending us from the ruin of invaſions, the inſults of a proud enemy, and the iron rod of oppreſſion: theſe are indeed great things, but the ſalvation of Chriſt is infinitely greater and more valuable.

It is the higheſt perfection of the divine bleſſings, the full ſatisfaction of man's ſpiritual capacities; it delivers us from all evil, and crowns us with "joy unſpeakable and full of glory." Nay, it not only contains in itſelf all that can make us happy, but it gives us new and more excellent capacities of enjoyment than by nature we could have; for it purifies our ſouls, enlightens our reaſon, and exalts our upper faculties to a wonderful degree. How plentiful are the fountains of joy that it opens to thoſe who ſincerely ſeek it.

The greateſt uneaſineſs, the heavieſt load to the heart of man, and which without a Redeemer might juſtly ſink it into the loweſt region of deſpair, is the ſenſe of guilt,

the conſciouſneſs of unforgiven ſin. But to be ſaved by Chriſt, is,

1. To receive the remiſſion of all our ſins, the moſt heinous not excepted. It is to have our paſt tranſgreſſions blotted out, and a new page turned over to us, in which we may write the faireſt and lovelieſt characters of virtue. It is to have our debts cancelled, and a new ſtock intruſted with us to improve. It is to have our painful apprehenſions, the ſcenes of horror and anguiſh removed, and a proſpect of light and comfort ſet before us. It is to be forgiven, not by man, but by God himſelf, whoſe abſolution, and whoſe only, may be ſecurely relied on.

Can men pretend to forgive us our ſins, who cannot diſtinguiſh between a ſpirit of piety, and a ſpirit of hypocriſy; who know not the ſincerity of our repentance, who if they pronounce ſentence in our favour cannot make it good; who if we fall and are deceived by them, cannot ſuffer in our ſtead? No; it is the pardon of Chriſt alone, who is all-knowing, and all-powerful, who ſits at the right-hand of the Fa-

ther, and is himſelf our judge, that can give us any true ground of conſolation, any ſtedfaſtneſs of hope.

Studious we are all of the eſteem of good men; if we have fallen from the friendſhip of one that has been our ornament, our honour and ſupport, what intereſt do we raiſe, what mediations do we court to regain it? But how inſignificant is the countenance of the beſt and greateſt of men, in compariſon of the approbation of God? To be accepted for Chriſt's ſake in the ſight of him who alone can diſtinguiſh real goodneſs, or the approaches to it; to be re-admitted to his favour, which bleſſes us at the ſame time that it receives us; to be reconciled to him through the blood of the everlaſting covenant; to have him become a kind, a compaſſionate, a gracious father to us, who was before a conſuming fire, an angry and terrible God; to be reſtored to his peace, and delivered from the remorſe of conſcience, to be the objects of his providential care, of his enlivening grace and love; this is ſalvation, and happineſs indeed.

2. Ano-

2. Another quality of this great ſalvation is, that it ſets us free from the dominion of ſin, and ſuffers it not to reign in our mortal bodies. It deſtroys the allurements of the fleſh; it baffles the wiles, and blunts the terrors of all our ſpiritual enemies.

Even outward vaſſalage, the being compelled perpetually to follow another man's commands whether right or wrong; the poſſeſſing nothing we can call our own; the being liable to be ſtripped of all, and ſhut up in the narrow and dark walls of a hungry priſon; this we think, and think truly, is a dreadful thing: but the miſery of it is terminated by the grave, which cannot be far diſtant, "where the ſlave is free from the oppreſſor, where the wicked ceaſe from troubling, and the weary are at reſt." It is leſs than nothing, when compared to the being led captive by our grand enemy, at his will, and ſubmitting to his hateful and malicious ſway; for he is a tyrant that is never glutted with cruelty, that is not to be ſatiated with cries and groans.

The

The yoke of temporal tyranny would ſit more hard on us, if it were placed there by enemies who had been deſpicable and odious to us; we ſhould abhor it, and be always ſtruggling to diſengage ourſelves: ought we not then much more to ſpurn the chains of the tempter, who has not only been always active and buſy in ſeducing mankind to their ruin; but is the meaneſt and moſt abject being in the univerſe, ſunk into the loweſt dregs of wickedneſs and miſery.

From his tyranny, as well as from the imperious call of the many raging paſſions produced by vice, the ſalvation of Chriſt delivers us. For it produces a new principle of liberty and virtue in us; it makes us maſters of ourſelves, which is a greater conqueſt than the ſubduing of a city; it raiſes our ſpirits to many great and noble deſigns, to the inheritance of glory, to the love of the everlaſting God. It gives us the deſire of our hearts; for it teaches us to deſire nothing but what is innocent, and conſiſtent with the will of God. It tranſlates

ſlates us out of the darkneſs of folly and impiety into the marvellous light of grace, by making our duty eaſy, and a rational conduct pleaſant and natural to us. It teaches our appetites and affections to move without diſorder and perplexity, without hurry and violence, in exact diſcipline and good array.

We juſtly account it a bleſſed thing to live as becomes a moral agent even for one day: how much more excellent is it, to be enabled to live as becomes chriſtians, through the whole tenure of life, and in a ſhort time, to attain to an unſinning immortality!

How great an honour and privilege is it for our nature thus to be made capable of partaking of the divine; to have it in our power to live according to the rules of wiſdom and truth, and to enjoy a happy eternity with our Maker?

3. The ſalvation of Chriſt delivers us from final condemnation, and future miſery. This is the natural conſequence of its putting

ting us into a ſtate of ſpiritual liberty and ſincere righteouſneſs; for the ſoul by original attraction will aſcend to the Father of ſpirits, to God who gave it, when it is not preſſed down by ſin, and fettered by corruption.

How happy will it be for the holy and humble man to be publicly approved by his great Lord and Maſter, and to eſcape the vengeance to come, in that terrible day when he ſhall come to convince all ungodly men of the unrighteous deeds they have committed, and to puniſh thoſe that know not God!

From theſe ſcenes of aſtoniſhment and ruin, the ſalvation of Chriſt ſets us free: "for he hath the keys of death and of hell; he ſhutteth and no man can open, he openeth and no man can ſhut."

Therefore let us with that great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds and people and tongues, that ſhall ſtand before the throne, and

and before the Lamb, cloathed with white robes, and palms in their hands; let us fall down and ſay "Salvation to our God which ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Bleſſing, and glory, and wiſdom, and thankſgiving, and honour, and power, and might be unto our God for ever and ever. AMEN."

SERMON II.

The Danger of delaying Repentance.

JOHN ix. 4.

I muſt work the works of him that ſent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.

IT has always been a maxim of wiſdom, that when by due deliberation we perceive any buſineſs to be highly conducive to our intereſt, we ſhould loſe no time in the execution of it, but proceed with activity

vity and diſpatch. In ſecular affairs this rule is pretty well obſerved; he who has ſome great advantage of wealth or honour in view, will riſe early, take reſt late, and eat the bread of carefulneſs till he has made ſure of ſucceſs: but though there is none of us that will not own repentance to be a work of great moment to his happineſs, yet the greateſt part of men are ſtrangely dilatory in the performance of it. To a proſpect of worldly gain they will ſacrifice their eaſe, and hazard their lives; they will bear the labours of the earth and the dangers of the ſeas; they will lay hold on every thing that may help forward their deſign, and meet even death itſelf in its moſt dreadful form: and yet how improvident, how ſlothful, and faint-hearted ſhall they be in labouring for a treaſure whoſe price is above rubies, an eternal treaſure which waxeth not old, that better part which cannot be taken from the poſſeſſor! So it is, "the children of this world are wiſer in their generation than the children of light."

In

In our ſpiritual as well as temporal concerns, ſlackneſs and delay are always attended with vexation and diſappointment. While we will not reſolve when or how to begin, it becomes too late to begin at all. Expedition gives life to all our attempts; it keeps up our ſpirits and improves our courage; a due rapidity pierces through many difficulties; it gives a double ſtrength and vigour to our motions, and performs many great exploits. We know what ſucceſſes have been gained in war by a quickneſs of diſpatch; by early taking the field, and long and laborious marches at the firſt: nor ſhall we be leſs ſucceſsful in our chriſtian warfare, if we heartily and immediately put ourſelves under duty.

Let us begin our work ſoon and well, and it will be half finiſhed. Let us but get over the threſhold of repentance, let us but unlock the gates of virtue, and the reſt of our journey will be more ſmooth and eaſy. Sin will make the greateſt efforts to reſiſt us at the firſt attack, it will

ſet

ſet all its forces, its terrors and allurements in array againſt us at the beginning: if we do but conquer theſe, the oppoſition it can afterwards make will be more weak and languid; its arrows will be blunted, and more eaſily repelled, and its ſtratagems will be detected and avoided. Beſides, when we have a little proceeded in virtue, and diſcovered its beauty; when we have taſted the heavenly gift, and know the powers of the world to come, inexpreſſible ſatisfaction will ſweeten our labour, and our care will carry its reward along with it. "I rejoice (ſaid the pſalmiſt) in thy commandments as one that findeth great ſpoils."

Our time is a talent committed to our truſt, and we ſhall be called to a ſtrict account for our management of it. It is indeed the moſt precious of all talents; for our other endowments, our wit, or wealth, or credit, cannot be employed for the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind, without it. It is not to be purchaſed by flattery, nor to be bought with gold; neither prayers nor tears can fetch it back again.

Riches, if loſt may be recovered; nay reputation itſelf, when blaſted, may bloom again; but the loſs of time is irreparable. When the portion of it that is allotted us expires, the world cannot buy us another day; there is no reprieve to be procured from the divine ſentence. "And he who liveth in ſin is dead while he liveth:" nay he is even worſe than that; for death conſidered as a ſtate of inaction, is not ſo bad as an activity in evil. His time is not only loſt but miſemployed, and by that miſemployment he has earned himſelf eternal death. The only thing that can give us an enjoyment of the years that are paſt is, to have beſtowed them in doing good. A righteous man lives the time that he has laid out in good works twice over, for he has as much pleaſure in remembring and reflecting upon them, as he had in performing them. The days that we have ſpent in virtue are indeed moſt ſecurely ours; they are out of the reach of temptation and corruption, and are treaſured up in the book of the divine remembrance, to be acknowledged and rewarded hereafter. No tyrant

can

can rob us of them, nor any thing but the falſeneſs of our own hearts in forſaking our firſt love. "If the righteous man turn from his righteouſneſs, and do according to all the abominations that the wicked doeth, then indeed his righteouſneſs ſhall be remembered no more, but in the tranſgreſſions that he hath committed, and in the ſins that he hath ſinned, in thoſe ſhall he die."

"The time paſt of our life (ſaith St. Peter) may ſuffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles." It is too much to have ſo long uſed an excellent gift of God unprofitably, to have let ſlip ſo many fair opportunities of improving ourſelves and of ſerving God; after we have ſlept ſo long in ſin, 'tis ſurely now high time to awake, to be vigilant and ſober. If before Chriſt ſuffered in the fleſh, men walked in laſciviouſneſs, luſts, exceſs of wine, revellings, and abominable idolatries; they were more excuſable than we, who live under a more perfect diſpenſation, have a more clear proſpect of future rewards and puniſhments, and know

that the wrath of God againſt ſin is ſo great, that nothing but the blood of Chriſt could atone for it, and procure us place for repentance.

Let thoſe that refuſe to return to their duty now, remember that they will grievouſly repent it ſome time or other. If they will not admit a timely ſorrow for ſin, it will at laſt clothe them with confuſion for ever. If they will not be aſhamed of their vices now, everlaſting ſhame will be their portion. "When the evil days ſhall come, and the years draw nigh in which they have no pleaſure," when they ſhall be viſited with ſickneſs and affliction, when the diverſions of life can no longer amuſe them, nor ſcenes of buſineſs hide them from themſelves; then they will condemn their paſt ſupineneſs, and earneſtly wiſh for a thing which is impoſſible to be granted, that they might live their lives over again. Or if we can ſuppoſe that any man can be deaf to the threatnings of vengeance, and ſuppreſs the fears of puniſhment all his life, yet the next world will rouſe him from his

lethargy, the furies of his own conſcience will be let looſe upon him, and he will condemn himſelf for ever. Is it not then better to ſearch our wounds? Is it not better to ſuffer the ſorrow of repentance betimes, than the anguiſh of unavailing remorſe when it is too late.

The longer men continue in ſin, the deeper their contrition, and the more bitter muſt their humiliation be, if they come to repent at all. They muſt long exerciſe themſelves in acts of ſelf-denial and holy ſorrow, before they can look up to God as a reconciled and gracious Father. Though God ſhould forgive them immediately, yet they cannot forgive themſelves for having been enemies to ſo good, ſo excellent a Being. They cannot remember their paſt ingratitude without trouble of heart; they muſt review their former crimes with a heavy eye; they muſt ſeverely lament the miſchief their bad example has done; and endeavour to obviate the evil influence of it by a public acknowledgment of their errors, and an open abhorrence of their ſins.

They muſt humble their ſoul not only for their own offences, but for thoſe they have been inſtrumental in leading other people into; not only for the evil they have done, but for that which they have occaſioned; and they muſt pray earneſtly that God would open the eyes of thoſe men whom by their encouragement or connivance they have turned aſide to vanity. They muſt take the ſhame of their folly to themſelves, and mourn for the cauſe they have given the enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme. "They ſhall remember their own evil ways, and their doings that were not good, and ſhall loath themſelves in their own ſight for their iniquities." And they muſt be perpetually jealous of themſelves, and afraid of relapſing into their old ſins, which were become ſo natural to them.

Beſides, the longer we put off our repentance, the more difficult it will become. It is impoſſible to ſtay at any determined pitch of virtue or vice; for we are always growing either better or worſe. The ſoul of man cannot remain in the ſame ſtate; it

it is always either advancing towards the perfection of angels, or elſe ſinking into the degeneracy of wicked ſpirits. He who daily employs himſelf in worſhipping God, will find his love of divine things increaſe, and will more and more reſemble that perfection on which he meditates: but he that wilfully eſtranges himſelf from God, will ſtill be removed at farther diſtance from him. In the human ſyſtem the animal part and the ſpiritual are always contending; the prevalence of the former depreſſes us into the earth, and a victory on the latter ſide raiſes us towards heaven. This victory depends on the exerciſe of faith. Our paſſions by indulgence become more importunate. If we hope that they will cool of themſelves, or that after we have ſatisfied our curioſity by one gratification, we ſhall not be ſo much inclined to a ſecond compliance, we are deplorably miſtaken. Temptations preſent themſelves to a young ſinner in a leſs violent form; they attack him leiſurely, and gain ground upon him gradually, ſo that he has time to call his reaſoning powers to his aſſiſtance, and

to oppoſe their increaſe. But upon the habitual ſinner evil thoughts come without ceremony; they are familiar and intruſive; they plead the right of poſſeſſion, and are loud and clamorous if he pretends to caſt them out. With ſuch a one temptations are uſed to conquer, and therefore are bold and urgent; they do not grow up by little and little, but are produced at their full ſize, and ready to bring forth their corrupt fruit at once. He muſt either reſiſt the firſt appearance of evil, or elſe he will be ſure to be worſted by it. An old ſinner needs no tempter but his own heart. The world may ſpare its allurements, and has no occaſion to exert thoſe enchantments with which it bewitches beginners; and Satan in "walking to and fro, and ſeeking whom he may devour," needs viſit him very ſeldom; but may ſtand aloof and laugh at the deſtruction which he brings upon himſelf. The poiſon is entered into his temper, and the infection works of itſelf. His imagination is deeply tinctured with the ſtain, and is perpetually ſupplying him with new ſcenes of tranſgreſſion. Evil thoughts ariſe

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in him unprovoked, and by cheriſhing and delighting in theſe, he can ſin without the help of exterior objects. Such a man has no means of reformation left, but a firm and immediate oppoſition to his ill inclinations, a reſolute ſuppreſſion of them, and immediately turning aſide his thoughts to a better ſubject.

The fear of ſhame was ordered by the wiſe author of our nature as a ſtrong guard upon our virtue. A love of decency, a reverence for mankind, and a regard for the world's opinion, is natural to the ſoul of man. As ſoon as we come to reflect at all, we are ſenſible of the excellency of virtue, and bluſh to fall ſhort of the performance of it. But when by repeated violence done themſelves, men have broken through this native modeſty, they will find it very hard to recover. Their reputation is already gone they think, the cenſure is paſt upon them, and they have nothing more to loſe; ſo they proceed in their vices without reluctance.

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Conſcience is indeed the greateſt reſtraint from vice. It is a kind of deity within us; it directs us in the way of righteouſneſs, and calls us to a ſevere account when we deviate from it. A young offender will have more pain in the remembrance of his ſin, than he had pleaſure in the commiſſion of it. But when the voice of conſcience has been often neglected, when its judgment has been often braved, at length it ceaſes to contend, and becomes weary of chiding. The heart becomes hard and callous, and not to be pierced with common remorſe. In great diſeaſes men are reckoned to be in moſt danger when they are leaſt ſenſible of their pain: ſo in like manner thoſe are the moſt deſperate ſinners, who are paſt feeling. While men are but of ſhort ſtanding in impiety, reaſon recalls them; it repreſents to them the folly, the baſeneſs and danger of their evil courſes: but how hardly will that man be reclaimed, who has often embraced ſin in ſpite of the utmoſt conviction of its deformity, and its certain tendency to miſery and ruin; who has known and neglected all the

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arguments for a good life; all the endearments of bounty and of love, and the terrors of eternal death itſelf? Thoſe that have often made ſome weak and heartleſs attempts to amend their lives, and have been baffled in them, come at length to loſe all their courage, and abandon all hopes of repentance. A faint reſiſtance of their paſſions will not do, and they will not be at the trouble of much mortification; they plunge therefore into their ſins deeper than ever, and become intirely profligate. If then a late repentance be at once ſo uncertain, and ſo difficult, ſurely it becomes us without farther delay to proceed with this great work, and to "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, leſt any of us be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin."

This we ſhall the rather do, if we conſider *laſtly*, that the later we repent, the leſs will be our reward in heaven. Our bleſſed Saviour tells us that "in his Father's houſe are many manſions;" and he ſeems to intimate that he went to prepare a

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place of particular glory for the apoſtles, who turned many to righteouſneſs and ſuffered martyrdom for his name. It is ſaid that at the day of judgment, the ſaints after their own acquittal ſhall ſit with Chriſt, and ſhall judge angels, that is the fallen ſpirits of darkneſs; and expreſly, that the apoſtles "ſhall ſit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael." This is farther intimated in the parable of the nobleman, "who went into a far country to receive to himſelf a kingdom; and he called unto him his ten ſervants, and delivered them ten pounds,* and ſaid unto them, occupy till I come." And when at his return he had given his approbation to thoſe that had made an improvement, he commanded the ſervant whoſe pound had gained ten pounds to be ruler over ten cities, and him that had gained five, to be over five cities. Nor is this doctrine of the different degrees of glory which the ſaints ſhall have, contradicted by the parable of the labourers, who were called at

* To each an equal ſtock.

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different times of the day to work in the vineyard, and yet received every man only a penny. For this parable ſeems not to relate to the final retributions at the day of judgment, ſince there will be no murmuring among the righteous then, but it ſeems to figure out to us the different diſpenſations of God to mankind, the natural light of reaſon which was given men at firſt, the revelation that was made to the Patriarchs, the calling of the Jews, and laſt of all of the Gentiles. The Jews were highly diſpleaſed that the heathen were admitted to equal privileges with them whoſe were the fathers, and the promiſes, and the oracles of God: "They murmured againſt the good man of the houſe, ſaying, Theſe laſt have wrought but one hour, and thou haſt made them equal unto us, that have borne the burden and heat of the day." But they are ſeverely rebuked by our bleſſed Saviour for their envy. "I will give, ſays he, to this laſt even as unto thee;" i. e. I will grant the bleſſing of the goſpel to the Gentiles as well as you. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?

own? Is thine eye evil becauſe I am good?" The divine communications of light and grace are all pure unmerited favour. But the different meaſures of glory in another world, are moſt clear from St. Paul's deſcription of the reſurrection. "There is one glory of the ſun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the ſtars; for one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory; ſo alſo is the reſurrection of the dead." The bodies of all the ſaints ſhall ſhine with a heavenly ſplendor, but the luſtre of thoſe ſhall be greateſt who have done and ſuffered moſt for the ſake of their Lord. We ſhall not be rewarded for the ſake of our works, but we ſhall be rewarded according to them. They who give only the refuſe of their days to the ſervice of God, cannot expect to be recompenſed like thoſe who have loved and obeyed him the greateſt part of their lives. But though there be different portions of felicity in heaven, there will be no room for repining, becauſe the capacities of all will be filled, and becauſe the joy and happineſs of all the ſaints is the joy and happineſs of every one. Who then

(as one elegantly expreſſes it) for all the fading honours of this world would loſe one ſpark of everlaſting glory? Who for all the pleaſures here would forego one degree of bliſs hereafter? Who for all the treaſures below would let ſlip one gem out of his heavenly crown? Every minute we delay our repentance, contracts a damage that runs through millions of ages.

Let us then not labour ſo much for the meat that periſheth as for that which endureth to eternal life. "Let us not look at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal. Let us work the works of him that ſent us while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work. Let us make haſte, and not delay the time to keep God's commandments: for behold, now is the appointed time; behold, now is the day of ſalvation!"

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SERMON III.

Thoughts on the Delay of temporal Puniſhments.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.

THERE is nothing that in all ages, has given greater offence, has hurt the intereſts of religion, and promoted the ſpreading of vice more, than the ſeemingly unequal diſtribution of temporal happineſs and miſery, without a proportional regard to the merits and demerits of men. For the wicked ſeeing one event to the righteous and to themſelves, that ſuch as ſwore raſhly or falſely, and ſuch as feared and reverenced an oath, were not diſtinguiſhed by any outward marks of the divine

vine favour or diſpleaſure; inſtead of concluding from it the immortality of the human ſoul, and the goodneſs of God, as they ought to have done, by the moſt ungrateful perverſeneſs, have argued from the mercy and long-ſuffering of the Deity againſt his being and providence, and inferred that either there was no God, or that he did not delight in virtue, or ſuperintend the affairs of this lower world. And inſtead of being led to repentance, which was the uſe God intended they ſhould make of his forbearance, they have hardened themſelves incurably in their crimes, and increaſed their final condemnation. Others, that do not go ſo far as to queſtion the exiſtence or providential care of a ſupreme cauſe, are yet engaged in a fallacy no leſs deſtructive; for enjoying preſent impunity, and feeling no immediate ill conſequence of their ſins, they flatter themſelves that they ſhall long be ſpared, and are ruined by a vain proſpect of a diſtant amendment. Now this, far from being chargeable on our heavenly Father, as if he did not take the moſt effectual me-

thods to ſupport virtue, and to diſencourage vice, is owing to the inexcuſable depravity and corruption of men, who abuſe his diſpenſations, will not be won by his patience to obey him, nor be reformed by the inflictions of the rod itſelf.

The Jewiſh ſtate was a theocracy; God was a long time their king in a peculiar manner; and the promiſes and threatnings annexed to the law of Moſes were ſuch as related to the bleſſings and evils of this life: accordingly we find that their hiſtory is a continued account of their riſe or fall, as they ſubmitted themſelves to the will of God, or withdrew their allegiance from him. If they revolted to idolatry, or gave themſelves up to any other wickedneſs, they were ſmitten by their enemies, and viſited with plagues; but when they performed a faithful obedience, they were made to flouriſh greatly. And the ſame has been obſerved, though not in ſo eminent a degree, of all other nations, that while they have acted up to the obligations of religion and morality, they have been

been attended with proſperity and ſucceſs; but when once they abandoned themſelves to prophaneneſs, or luxury, or effeminacy, or oppreſſion, their glory has withered, and they have been humbled even to the duſt.

But though the general appearances of providence might thus be vindicated, yet with reſpect to particular perſons the caſe was not the ſame; good or bad fortune (as they are called) being more promiſcuouſly diſpenſed, and ſcattered, as ſlight obſervers might think, with a careleſs hand. So that even good men were ſometimes ſtaggered at the ſtate, and health, and plenty of their impious neighbours, while themſelves ſhifted hardly, and were exerciſed in ſufferings. "Lo theſe are the ungodly (ſaith the author of Pſalm lxxiii.) theſe proſper in the world, and theſe have riches in poſſeſſion: and I ſaid, then have I cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency." He was ſhocked at it, and endeavoured to underſtand it, but it was too hard for him. Until

he went into the ſanctuary of God, proſtrated himſelf in meditation and prayer, and was illuminated with heavenly grace: "then underſtood I the end of theſe men," namely, how thou doſt ſet them in ſlippery places, and caſteſt them down, and deſtroyeſt them; how thou bringeſt them often to a fearful end in this life, or however always puniſheſt them in another. But the aſſured comfort and ſhield of the righteous man is, that "though his fleſh and his heart fail, yet God is the ſtrength of his heart and his portion for ever; who will guide him with his counſel here, and after that receive him into glory."

The Gentiles had very confuſed notions concerning the duration of the ſoul, and the allotments of the inviſible world; and the Jews, though better inſtructed than they, yet had but a dim proſpect of futurity: but now that futurity is fully revealed to us by the goſpel, and we are informed that a general judgment is appointed, wherein all men ſhall receive the things done in the body, whether they be good

or evil, one would think that we have little occaſion either to doubt of the juſtice and careful inſpection of God; or for a little preſent ſuffering of the righteous, and proſperity of the wicked, which is quickly at an end, to be tempted to continue in ſin. So, however it is, fear is generally the moſt prevailing remedy, and operates moſt ſtrongly in men's ungenerous minds, and they are ſooner brought to repentance by the diſcipline of affliction, than drawn by the cords of love, and influenced by the ſacred ties of gratitude. The tempers of men indeed are various, and God no doubt applies to all in the moſt proper manner for their correction, ſo far as the freedom of their will and the agency of their choice admits, and in his infinite wiſdom he manages every thing for the beſt. He will not force men to be virtuous, nor will he make this world ſuch a ſcene of horror, as it would be, if vengeance were repaid to all bad men here according to their deſert; but in the mean time he ſufficiently animates his ſervants, as well as checks thoſe that run headlong in vice and folly. Still,

alas! the maxim of the wiſe man is too much verified, that "becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil."

By an "evil work" in this place is not meant all ſins, as well thoſe of infirmity and ſurpriſe as others, but only ſuch great and flagrant offences, ſuch notorious crimes as the world is alarmed at, and is ready to mark out for puniſhment. And by the "ſentence" here mentioned is not meant that ſentence which God paſſes as a judge, (for that is always executed) but the ſanctions of terror which he hath delivered for the maintenance of his laws.

Now had the Almighty declared that he would conſtantly and without delay exert his wrath againſt unrepented ſin in this world, then indeed he might juſtly be accounted dilatory; ſince 'tis plain he does not do that: but as he has only declared in general that he will certainly recompenſe indignation to impenitent of-

fenders, and has reſerved the time and ſeaſon of it to his own wiſe appointment, none can accuſe him of a breach of promiſe, nor ſay that he is unmindful of his covenant.

Without controverſy, his ſparing the wicked, and deferring their doom, muſt be reſolved into his goodneſs only: it ſhews that it is not his deſire "that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance." It is evermore in his almighty power to deſtroy the ſinner; but he holds his avenging hand, that he may have opportunity to return to a better mind. His goodneſs is the ſpring from which flow both the bleſſings and comforts he diſpenſes to the righteous, and his clemency and forbearance towards the wicked; for he is kind even to the unthankful and the evil, in order to reform them; and he ſendeth rain upon the juſt and the unjuſt. Judgment is called his ſtrange work, and the prophet Hoſea repreſents him, with all the bowels of compaſſion, declining to deſtroy his ungrateful people: "My heart is

turned within me, my repentings are kindled together; I will not execute the fierceneſs of my wrath; I will not return to deſtroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man," not ſpirited on by revenge to ſhew my reſentment preſently, like weak and frail man, but patient to wait for the converſion of all who have not hardened themſelves paſt feeling.

And though the conſciences of ſome, exclude all the influences of the Holy Spirit, though their hearts be fully ſet in them to do evil; yet in others God receives ample fruits of his long-ſuffering, and his mercy is magnified in that they fear and reverence him the more. For it has often happened, that great ſinners being indulged with time to conſider, have become ſincerely good and pious; that thoſe who had been remarkably diſobedient, being once reclaimed from the error of their way, have been no leſs remarkably penitent and holy. This therefore ſufficiently juſtifies God's governing the world with clemency, and his ſlowneſs to puniſh.

niſh. And where is that perfect man who dares preſume to ſay, that his Maker is over merciful? Which of us is there that does not owe his virtue to the progreſs of time? Whoſe heart was ever clear of weeds, till they were plucked out of it with much culture and long care? Or rather, how can God in any ſhape be termed ſlack to adminiſter an impartial juſtice, when this life, that is the utmoſt boundary of his forbearance to the wicked, is itſelf very ſhort and fleeting? Quickly will the lives of all that are now in being, be as ſo many arrows ſhot through the air, whoſe place can no where be diſcerned. Quickly ſhall we be ſummoned before our Judge, naked and defenceleſs, to give an account of ourſelves, and to receive the reward of our works. For though the general judgment may be at a great diſtance, yet every ſoul is conſigned either to a ſtate of happineſs or miſery, by the equitable deciſion of God, immediately after it leaves the body. So that, as Solomon has it in the verſe after the text, "though a ſinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be pro-

prolonged, yet it ſhall not be well with the wicked." God's unchangeable veracity and inviolable juſtice will certainly be exerciſed on thoſe, who will not glorify his mercy by hearkening to its voice, nor accept the gracious overtures of his ſalvation.

The principal intention indeed of God in puniſhing ſome wicked men, while he ſpares others in this life, ſeems to be, that it may teach us the credibility of that final audit and grand aſſize which will be held at the conſummation of things. If no bad men were ſcourged with his heavy wrath on this ſide the grave, we ſhould then have a colourable pretence to diſpute the diſtinction between virtue and vice, and the difference between moral good and evil, ſince we could not perceive the effects of either by all that was before us. Some that have great vices have alſo great virtues, and therefore their ſentence may be reſpited becauſe there is ſomething good in them. But ſince by the conſtitution of nature and the care of providence, moſt profligate perſons are overtaken with dread-

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ful calamities in this world, 'tis evident that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with ſatisfaction, and that he will pour out tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil.

On the other hand, if all bad men without exception groaned under torments, and periſhed miſerably here, beſides that virtue would loſe all its liberty and its praiſe, ſince men would be compelled by the dread of impending miſery to obey its laws; one would be tempted to think that God had emptied the vials of his wrath, and ſuffered his whole diſpleaſure to ariſe in the preſent ſcene, and that there was no after-reckoning, nor any ſtate in reſerve at all.

However, the temporal judgments of God are not ſo ſlowly put in execution, as ſome imagine. We ſee indeed men's outward appearance, but we ſee not often the real ſtate of their minds. Great troubles run deep and ſecret, and are more afflictive for being confined to the breaſt.

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The ſorrows of the mind exceed thoſe of the body, becauſe men can ſeldom ſafely relieve themſelves by communicating them. And I think all men muſt own, that as they have their bleſſings either corporeal or ſpiritual to be thankful for, ſo they have had alſo conſiderable uneaſineſſes either in their fortune, or health, or in the interior ſtate of their minds, to humble them before God, and to call them to do their duty.

To conclude: "If ſentence againſt an evil work be not ſpeedily executed," let not our hearts be fully ſet in us to do evil, but let us conclude that vengeance will come the heavier at laſt. Let us not imagine, if juſtice ſlumbereth a while, that there is no providence to take care of things below, but let us remember that the exact adjuſtment is reſerved for another day. Let us not deſpiſe the riches of God's forbearance and long-ſuffering, but let his goodneſs have its deſigned effect upon us, let it lead us to repentance.

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SERMON IV.

The final and immediate Miſeries of Wickedneſs.

ISAIAH lvii. 20, 21.

The wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt. There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.

THE moſt reſtleſs and raging thing in nature is a troubled ſea, and it is juſtly reckoned one of the great prerogatives of the divine power, that it can ſay to the proud waves thereof, "Be ſtill," and keep them from breaking in upon the earth. Nor is it only the moſt unquiet, but the moſt aſtoniſhing ſcene imaginable to the unhappy paſſenger, when it is toſſed and agitated by winds and ſtorms. Now this is a proper emblem of the mind of a wicked man, which is often full of diſ-

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quiet and anxiety, and ſwelled by the guſts of paſſion with no leſs violence than the ſea is by tempeſts. And as that produces ſhipwrecks and deaths, and caſts up mire and dirt, ſo all that the ſoul of ſuch a one brings forth is tumult and diſorder, vexation and miſery; and the bitterneſs of its own reflections is only the prelude to eternal death.

But ſome perhaps will ſay, is not this ſolemn and reiterated aſſertion of ſcripture, "that there is no peace to the wicked," contrary to experience? Has it not been the complaint of all ages, an encouragement to the bad, and a ſtumbling-block and ſurpriſe to the beſt of men, that the wicked have enjoyed uninterrupted peace and proſperity, that they have rioted in all the pleaſures of life, and at laſt died in their beds? Are not ſuch bad men as flouriſh in high ſtations the envy of their inferiors? And, if they envy them, do they not at leaſt allow their condition to be more happy than their own? As to this ſeemingly unequal diſpenſation of providence, with re-

regard to the outward good things of this life, I ſhall only obſerve at preſent, that the true meaſures of happineſs and miſery are not to be taken from the external circumſtances and appendages of fortune, but from the contentment of the mind. And is any thing more undeniably certain, than that ſome are more contented and eaſy in themſelves, than others who are greatly their ſuperiors in point of figure and eſtate? Nay, is it not eaſy to obſerve, that the acceſſion of fortune has deprived ſome of that tranquility of mind which they before enjoyed, and that their ambitious deſires have increaſed upon them, and grown much faſter than their acquiſitions? It is not affluence, or the pomp of retinue, that can quiet the uneaſineſs of the heart, or diſcompoſure of the ſpirit. Elſe what was it that made Haman burn with pride and indignation, becauſe one inſignificant perſon, poor Mordecai, would not bow the knee to him, when at the ſame time he had the advantage of all the wealth and honour of the Perſian court? A good man is reſigned to providence, and will be eaſy

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and happy in the loweſt circumſtances, and a wicked man cannot poſſibly be ſo in any.

The latter is what I am to prove: From a conviction of this truth it is, that thoſe who have been moſt acquainted with the affairs and the hearts of men, and ſearched deepeſt into the nature of things, have been moſt ready to acquit providence of injuſtice, and to admire the wiſdom of the divine adminiſtration, which takes occaſion to puniſh the vicious by a ſeeming gratification of their deſires. A ſeeming gratification I ſay; for the higheſt honours, the greateſt riches and pleaſures, can never really ſatisfy the deſires, conquer the fears, or allay the paſſions of an ungoverned mind.

As the higheſt pleaſures, and thoſe that diſtinguiſh us from the inferior creation, are of an intellectual and moral kind, viz. the ſatisfactions of knowledge, of thinking juſtly, of acting reaſonably, and doing good; ſo the greateſt pains are thoſe that deſtroy the ſerenity and peace of the ſoul. A man who labours under an acute

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diſtemper, feels no relief from the elegance of his bed or grandeur of his apartment; no more can a man be happy, though he has all the entertainments in the world at command, while the ſting of conſcience remains in his breaſt. The only true foundation therefore of felicity, is that which either ſuppoſes a ſound mind or makes it ſo; I mean religion.

To come to particulars:

A wicked man can have no peace either with God, with his neighbour, or with himſelf.

Firſt, he can have no peace with God. In the order of things this is the firſt conſideration, becauſe all the reſt depends upon it. No man that thinks at all, can be at eaſe in any degree, while he has cauſe to believe that the ſupreme Being is angry or diſpleaſed with him. For the idea we have of the ſupreme Being is, that he is endowed with infinite juſtice, holineſs and power; and how is it poſſible

for that man to have any peace in his mind, who conſiders that theſe perfections are armed for his deſtruction; who hath ſo much reaſon to conclude him his greateſt enemy, on whom he continually depends for his being, and at whoſe mercy he is every moment: who can viſit him with terrors and diſeaſes, with calamities and judgments in this life, and puniſh him with all the miſeries and curſes of the next? Now it is not any ſuperſtitious performances, any outward auſterity, or formal devotion, that can recommend us to the favour and approbation of God. We muſt lay aſide our love of ſin, before we can have any hopes of it. For "the wicked, and him that loveth violence, his ſoul hateth." We muſt renounce all intereſts contrary to his, love what he loves, and hate what he hates, before we can comfort ourſelves with the hopes of having made our peace with God. And therefore wilful and preſumptuous ſinners, have no manner of title to it, while they continue ſuch. What delight then can they take in the commiſſion of

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ſin, when the immediate conſequences of it are the racks of an enraged conſcience, the apprehenſions of everlaſting vengeance, and the terrors of divine wrath? I do not now aſk, what opinion the ſinner will be of, when the greatneſs of his miſery ſhall convince him, that it is an almighty hand that lays it upon him: but that which I demand is, what peace of mind an impenitent ſinner can have, who knows not how ſoon he may be diſpatched to that place of torment? Can he bind the hands of the Almighty, that he ſhall not ſnatch him away till he does repent? Can he reverſe the decrees of heaven, or ſuſpend the execution of them? Can he abrogate the force of his laws, and make his own terms with God?

Secondly, It is not probable that a wicked man will have any peace with his neighbour, or enjoyment of the ſocial bleſſings. If he be rich and great, flatterers indeed he may have many, but real friends in the day of trial and calamity he will have none. For friendſhip cannot ſubſiſt but

upon the baſis of virtue. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? (ſaith St. James) come they not hence, even of your luſts." Emulation, wrath, ſtrife, ſpring from a vicious temper, and are their own puniſhments. The litigious man engages himſelf in endleſs diſputes, and is often entangled in his own net. The covetous man, the extortioner, and whoever is diſhoneſt or unjuſt or oppreſſive in any kind, is both hated by his neighbour, and oftentimes ſeverely chaſtiſed, for his villainy. And if we conſider nations as acting treacherouſly in their public capacity; the breach of treaties, or invaſion of another's right, produces the ſcourge of war, which revenges itſelf in blood.

Thirdly, A wicked man can have no peace with himſelf; both on account of the violence and miſrule of his paſſions, and of the uneaſy reflections of his mind. Now this is the worſt caſe of all, when a man carries a ſevere cenſor in his own boſom that will not fail to condemn him, a domeſtic enemy from whom he cannot fly.

Other

Other troubles and inconveniencies in this world he may perhaps avoid by the advantage of his ſituation, but he can never eſcape the uneaſy workings of his own breaſt. He that is poſſeſſed of innocence and tranquility of mind, may ſtruggle through many outward difficulties and diſtreſſes with courage and unconcern, becauſe he has a ſupport within: but when external miſeries fall upon a heart that is overwhelmed with guilt, and with the painful apprehenſions that accompany it, they are aggravated and imbittered to the laſt degree. "The ſpirit of a man may bear his infirmities, but a wounded ſpirit who can bear?"

The peace of ſuch a one is, as I ſaid, deſtroyed, 1ſt. By the violence and miſrule of his paſſions. "What peace can poſſibly ſubſiſt in ſuch a ſtate of uſurpation (ſays one) where reaſon is dethroned, and the paſſions ſet up for arbitrary power? Nay, what confuſion and diſorder muſt not follow, where the moſt excellent powers of the ſoul, conſideration and will, are trampled

under foot by their own ſlaves the appetites; for none ever govern ſo ill as thoſe that ought to obey? How ſerene and clear and quiet is the mind of a man, where the upper faculties bear their proper ſway? How compoſed and conſiſtent is he in his temper, how regular and moderate in his deſires and fears? And, on the other hand, who can paint or deſcribe the convulſions of anger, or the faintings and ſhiverings of fear, that prevail in the breaſt of a wicked man? His paſſions inflame him, and the means he uſes to quench them enrage them more; his ambition increaſes along with his honours, and his avarice with his wealth: and what hopes can there be of a cure, where the diſeaſe thrives under the remedy? Covetouſneſs drags him one way, and pride and luxury another, and his fears combat with his love of revenge: and where paſſions ſo many, ſo great, ſo different, all gather ſtrength by being gratified, what diſturbance and confuſion follows? But ſuppoſe other paſſions ſhould agree in promoting the deſtruction of the human ſoul, yet what ſecurity can

a wicked man have againſt the power of his fears? Fears of diſappointment, fears of diſcovery, and fears of puniſhment in this world. And if he could by any means over-rule all theſe, yet the fears of that to come are ſufficient to rob him of all peace of mind, and impoſſible to be overcome by him. Nay, the greateſt grounds of comfort to other men are the ſtrongeſt foundations of his fears, the belief of a God, a providence, and future ſtate: and what can give that man peace, who is diſturbed with the very thoughts of the God of peace."

2dly, He ſuffers alſo under the laſhes of conſcience, and the uneaſy reflections of his own mind, which he can neither hinder nor endure. "No doubt if it were poſſible for him to deprive himſelf of the greateſt excellency of his being, it would be the firſt work he would do to break the glaſs which ſhews him his deformity. For as our Saviour ſaid, "every one that doeth evil hateth the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved;" not only the light

without, which diſcovers them, but that light of conſcience within, which not only ſhines but burns too. Hence proceeds that great uneaſineſs which a ſinner feels within, as often as he conſiders what he hath done amiſs, which we call the remorſe of conſcience, and is the natural conſequence of the violence which a man offers to his reaſon in his evil actions. "The backſlider in heart, ſaith Solomon, ſhall be filled with his own ways, but a good man ſhall be ſatisfied from himſelf." The doing juſt and worthy and generous things, without any ſiniſter ends and deſigns, leaves a moſt agreeable pleaſure upon the mind, like that of conſtant health, which is better felt than expreſſed. But take one who endeavours to blind, or corrupt, or maſter his conſcience, to make it ſerve ſome mean end or deſign; what perplexing thoughts, what ſuſpicions and jealouſies diſturb his imagination and rack his mind? I know that wicked men, in the height of their jollity, pretend to be above theſe things, and are ready to laugh at them as the effects of a ſtrong ſpleen or a weak brain: but

but I appeal to their moſt ſober thoughts, when the ſteams of wine are evaporated, and the intoxication of evil company is removed, when in the deep and ſilent night they revolve in their minds the actions of the foregoing day; what ſatisfaction they then take in all the ſinful pleaſures which they have purſued ſo eagerly? But eſpecially, when either their luſts have conſumed their bodies, or the vengeance of God hath overtaken them; when death begins to ſeize upon their vitals, and themſelves not wholly ſtupified through the power of their ſins or their diſeaſe, then, if it were poſſible, let any one repreſent the fears, the horror and aſtoniſhment which wicked men labour under in the remembrance of their evil actions. Their minds are like a troubled ſea, always working and uneaſy; but at the time of diſſolution, they are all over ſtorm and tempeſt. If conſcience ſhould be lulled aſleep by any opiate of outward proſperity in this life, and not thoroughly awaked here, yet it will do it moſt certainly in another: when the impenitent ſinner ſhall ſtand trembling before his

his judge, and the book of conscience shall be opened in his heart, wherein, like Ezekiel's roll, he finds "written within and without, lamentation and mourning and woe."

SERMON V.

On the Expediency and Necessity of Self-Knowledge.

PSALM iv. 4.

Commune with your own heart.

A Serious consideration of our own hearts, and a watching over their inclinations in order to correct them, is here recommended to us by a well-experienced saint as a most excellent preservative from sin. "Commune with your own heart," and that will be a means to make you stand in awe of the divine commandments. And to

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the doing this, a devout retirement from the world will greatly conduce; we muſt diſengage ourſelves from the cares and amuſements of life, and in our chamber, in private, obſerve the motions of our hearts, examine the drift of our paſſions, and ſearch out our ſpirit. Without thus ſequeſtering ourſelves to attend upon ſerious things, we ſhall be utterly unacquainted with the ſtate of our ſouls, and proceed in the dark, not knowing whither we go; liable to the fears and ſuſpicions of a final miſcarriage, and deſtitute of the comfortable well-grounded hope of a bleſſed reward. Without attending to religion when we are alone, when all is ſtill and quiet, we ſhall not attend it to any purpoſe. For in public we ſeldom have opportunity or inclination to meditate upon the divine perfections, to take a diſtinct ſurvey of our own faults and infirmities, and to humble ourſelves before God as we ought. Such perſons as will not bear to think of the obligations of piety, or to look into their own conduct in private, may have a general and confuſed notion that they

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they are ſinners, but they know not the degree and aggravation of their ſins, nor conſequently what degree of humiliation, what meaſure of ſorrow, or method of repentance, is required from them. Indeed, it is from an unwillingneſs to make ſatisfaction to offended juſtice, that they forbear to inform themſelves how great their debts, and how numerous their miſcariages are. For this reaſon they endeavour to forget themſelves in the multiplicity of buſineſs and of temporal affairs, and fly from the voice of conſcience to company, to diverſion, to mirth and play. 'Tis this produces again in its turn a neglect of the concerns of eternity, and confines their affections to the earth. Such a buſy, but withal impertinent way of living, makes all abſtraction of thought and the returns of devotion painful and uneaſy; it diſſolves and enervates the mind, and diſqualifies it for ſubmitting to any wholeſome auſterities which our duty may demand; and it makes men walk more boldly in the ways of deſtruction, becauſe it hinders them from perceiving their real danger. In the

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mean time perhaps they repair with decency to places of public worſhip, and with that they are contented. But alas! that alone is not ſufficient: For they may frequent religious aſſemblies out of complaiſance to others, or merely to preſerve the name of chriſtians: if they were actuated by a genuine ſpirit of piety, it would influence them every where alike, and they would ſet apart ſome proper times of private meditation, as well as attend upon more ſolemn occaſions.

Beſides, the performance of our duty in ſecret is the only teſt of our ſincerity, a ſure evidence of the integrity of our hearts, a proof that we do not deceive ourſelves, nor mock God with a formal ceremonious ſervice.

Give me leave therefore to exhort you to a conſtant and diligent inſpection of your hearts, by inſtancing in the great advantages of this practice towards the ſupport of virtue and innocence.

'Tis

'Tis the privilege and glory of man, which diſtinguiſhes him from the inferior part of the creation, that he is able to reflect upon the inward movements of his ſoul, to diſcover its inclinations, to obſerve its deſigns, and to paſs judgment upon them.

The creatures below man are capable of thinking, of remembring, not to ſay reaſoning; but they have not the leaſt ſhadow (ſo far as we can perceive) of the reflective power; they mind not what paſſes within them, they apprehend no rule of action, nor approve or condemn what they have done. And in truth they need no ſuch capacities, ſince they are guided by particular inſtinct to preſerve themſelves, and gratify their ſenſes. But man being deſigned for immortality, and made accountable for his behaviour, is not to follow the ſway of external impulſes, is not to be carried away by imagination, or to be blindly led by conſtitutional deſires; but muſt obey the law that is given him, manage his paſſions well, direct his purpoſes wiſely, and rectify his judgment of things:

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it was therefore neceſſary that he ſhould be qualified to diſcern the interior operations of his mind, and paſs ſentence of praiſe or blame upon them, according to their conformity or oppoſition to the eternal rules of morality, and the communications of God's will which he has been pleaſed to make. This is the peculiar excellence and advantage of our nature, and by the right uſe of it we may purify and exalt ourſelves to a better ſtate. 'Tis this that aſſiſts us to know and perform our duty, and conſtitutes us rewardable or puniſhable creatures.

For this reaſon we ought frequently to converſe with ourſelves, to "commune with our own heart" (as the pſalmiſt expreſſes it) and to diſcourſe with it in this manner; whither does the main ſtream of my thoughts turn? Are they grave, and ſeaſonable, and pure; or light, and fantaſtic, and vain? Do I make my natural inclinations ſubmit to reaſon, and regulate them by the divine law? Have I informed my judgment aright? Do I cleave ſincerely

to the truth, and fix my opinions upon a clear and ſolid foundation, without liſtening to the ſuggeſtions of prejudice, or the dictates of a ſect? What is it that moſt eaſily moves me; what temptations are moſt powerful and attracting; what paſſion is moſt predominant? Does the love of God prevail in me more than the love of the world? Are my affections calm, and tractable, and placed upon proper objects? Are the deſigns I have in view good and upright; or do they proceed from evil and corrupt principles? Do I propoſe to myſelf in all things the glory of God; or do I only ſeek my own glory? Do I ſubmit to his will, or ſtudy my own pleaſure? Theſe enquiries will furniſh ample matter for meditation; inſomuch that we need never be leſs alone or more employed, than when we are at leiſure and in ſolitude. And if we were thus careful to ſearch and correct our hearts, our actions would be governable enough; for whatever is good or bad in our actions proceeds from within; it takes its moral

denomination, and derives its tincture, from that ſource.

What a reproach will it be to us to cenſure or commend the deeds of others rightly, and to gueſs ſhrewdly from ſome outward ſymptoms at their principles and diſpoſition, and in the mean time to be ſtrangers to our own breaſt, to beſtow none of our curioſity there, but ſtudiouſly to ſhift our eyes from it? How abſurd and fooliſh to ſpy a mote in our neighbour's eye, and not to perceive a beam in our own? How prepoſterous to ſpend much time and care in obſerving other men's affairs, which do not concern us, and to apply no affiduity, no attention, to what relates to our own eternal intereſt? What ſhame to be continually wandering abroad, and to leave all at home in confuſion and uncertainty? He that commits ſin, ſeeing the guilt, and knowing the puniſhment, has a better chance to recover himſelf out of the ſnare, than one who knows not his ways, becauſe he will not ſearch his heart; who apprehends himſelf in no dan-

ger, and walks blindly on the top of a precipice. Thus he ſpeaks peace to his ſoul when there is no peace, and awakes not from his dream till he lifts up his eyes in torment. On the other hand, nothing can give us ſo ſolid a joy, and ſo well-grounded a hope, as an impartial ſcrutiny of our ſouls, and the teſtimony of a good conſcience reſulting thence. With what contentment and pleaſure will the proſpect of heaven inſpire us; and how will the love of God increaſe in us from the expectation of a bleſſed reward? That there is ſufficient ground for ſuch a comfortable hope to a good man cannot be denied: unleſs it be alſo denied that the ſcriptures are a clear and intelligible rule, (which would be impeaching the wiſdom and goodneſs of their author) as well as affirmed, that we are unable to compare our hearts and lives with that rule. "If our hearts condemn us not (ſays the apoſtle), then have we confidence towards God;" and in another place, "our rejoicing is this, the teſtimony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſdom, but

but by the grace of God, we have had our converſation in the world." Beſides, there is no duty to which we are oftner exhorted than this ſtudy of our hearts: ſo St. Paul tells us, "if we would judge ourſelves, we ſhould not be judged;" that is, we ſhould avoid ſuch miſcarriages as bring the divine judgments upon us: "Let us (ſaith the prophet Jeremiah) ſearch and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord:" and "ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be eſtabliſhed," is the wiſe man's counſel. However, a wiſe and good man, who knows his paſt faults and his preſent infirmities, though he does perceive that he has a title to God's favour, will ſtill be modeſt and ſuſpicious of himſelf; and will be in no danger of ſwelling into vanity and ſpiritual pride, ſince he knows that his attainments are owing to the divine grace, and that though he ſtands at preſent, he may hereafter fall.

The heart is indeed a very intricate object, its windings various, and its receſſes deep; but there is notwithſtanding a clue

to diſcover and unfold it. It "is (as the prophet ſays) deceitful above all things;" and, "who can know it?" The queſtion implies that a careleſs obſerver will be unacquainted with it, and that the ſearch will be difficult even to the moſt diligent; becauſe moſt men are prejudiced againſt the enquiry, unwilling to ſee their own faults, and to know their weakneſſes, and ſtill more unwilling to guard againſt them. They can proceed in their ſins with more eaſe and quiet, while they avoid the light and judgment of conſcience; and guilt, while it is diſregarded, will have no furies to menace, no ſtings to give them pain. But whoever, without the leaſt reſerve or prevarication, reſolves to quit every evil way, and with that intention ſtudiouſly applies himſelf to look into the depth of his own heart, may certainly unravel all its ſubtilties, detect every impoſture, and diſcern its abſtruſeſt receſſes. Fickle it is and mutable, liable to be changed by bodily temper or appetite, by company or example, ſo that we cannot foretel what its diſpoſition and circum-

cumſtances will be at any diſtance of time; but its preſent ſtate and inclinations we may undoubtedly diſcover.

This levity of temper, as it is an obſtacle to the diſcerning of our hearts, ſo it lays us under a neceſſity of watching over them without intermiſſion. It has been propoſed as a good rule never to cloſe our eyes in ſleep till we have well conſidered our thoughts, our words, and actions of the paſt day; till we have thanked the divine mercy for what we have done virtuouſly or innocently, as well as deplored our tranſgreſſions and neglects of the divine law, and renounced them for the time to come. And though this, like the ſearching of a wound, might give us pain at firſt, yet in time it would heal our infirmities, and yield us the happy ſatisfaction of finding the table of faults and errors grow ſhort by degrees. The knowledge of ourſelves has been always juſtly accounted an excellent part of knowledge: the Grecian ſage was declared the wiſeſt of men for uttering this ſentence, "know thyſelf:" and in truth the benefit

of that maxim is very great, ſince it not only tends to humble us by a ſight of our ſins, but to comfort us by ſhewing the ſincerity of our virtues, and the ſtrength of our advantages whether natural or acquired.

Next to an apprehenſion of the nature and perfections of God, this deſerves our greateſt care and application, and will be productive of the moſt happy fruit. Without this we ſhall miſtake ourſelves; we ſhall aſſume the merit of qualities which we poſſeſs not, and claim honours which we do not deſerve. Without deſcending into ourſelves we ſhall not be able to diſtinguiſh by what principle we are moved; whether it is the love of God, or ſelf-love and vain-glory that has induced us to the performance of plauſible duties. So the divine St. John charges the church of Laodicea with ſaying that ſhe was "rich, and increaſed in goods, and had need of nothing; not knowing that ſhe was wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked:" and St. Paul giving an account of ſuch preſumptions, ſays, "If a

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man think himſelf to be ſomething, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himſelf. But let every man prove his own work, and then ſhall he have rejoicing in himſelf alone, and not in another. For every man ſhall bear his own burden." No man indeed can truly eſteem himſelf, or find any ſound complacency and pleaſure in the courſe of his life and conduct, unleſs he has a clear view of the motives that influence him, and of the principles upon which he acts. For 'tis the impartial ſentence of a good and well-informed conſcience only, that will be confirmed in heaven. That man is a flatterer, not a friend to himſelf, who does not thoroughly acquaint himſelf with his own inward ſtate. A friend to himſelf I ſay; and to be ſo is the greateſt benefit of human life: for other friends may ſoften our cares, and ſhare our burdens ſometimes; but we have always occaſion to adviſe and to converſe with, to relieve and aſſiſt ourſelves; and therefore we ſhould chiefly take care to be at peace with our own breaſt, and to ſeek our own real happineſs.

I may add, that this practice will prepare us effectually for the Holy Sacrament, ſo that we ſhall be in no danger of receiving unworthily; according to St. Paul's injunction, "Let a man examine himſelf, and ſo let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." For it will teach us to approach it with faith, with full aſſurance that God will perform his promiſes of pardon to ſuch as love and obey him; and with repentance, with humble contrition for our ſins and failings, and with a firm purpoſe of amendment of life: ſo that we ſhall there receive the comfortable pledges of forgiveneſs, be filled with the divine grace, and repleniſhed with his bleſſing. Nay, it will fit us for death, and for giving account of ourſelves in judgment at the bar of heaven; though we ſhould be called to it ever ſo ſuddenly, at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning: and when the Judge ſhall begin to examine us, to call our ways to our remembrance, and to bring them to the teſt of his goſpel, this will be no ſtrange thing to us, ſince it is what we have done

ourſelves every day; ſince we have already trimmed our lamps with oil, as thoſe that wait for their Lord.

SERMON VI.

The Neceſſity of Religious Reflection.

HAGGAI i. 7.

Thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, Conſider your ways.

THOUGH infidelity produces no little wickedneſs, by a ſtudied diſtruſt of religion, a petulant humour of raillery, and prophane arguing againſt it; yet the chief overflowings of ungodlineſs are owing to heedleſſneſs and want of conſideration. Moſt men believe without any ſcruple the being and providence of God, the diſtinctions of virtue and vice, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; but the misfortune is, that they look upon theſe

theſe things only as Articles of Faith, and do not apply them to practice, do not attend to the obligations that ſuch a perſuaſion lays upon them, nor to the conſequences of their own actions. Unleſs by the dint of ſerious and frequent recollection, we impreſs upon our minds a ſtrong ſenſe of duty, a bare belief of the doctrines of the goſpel, will not be ſufficient to influence us to live virtuouſly.

When any temptation preſents itſelf to us, an uneaſineſs of appetite and deſire, which it raiſes, preſſes us to comply with it; except therefore by habitual reflection, we have gained ſuch a fear of the divine wrath, and ſuch a view of future miſery, as occaſions a greater uneaſineſs to reſiſt the former, we ſhall certainly be led into ſin; for the greater force of deſire or averſion will always prevail. Thus, if a man, by a habit of drinking, has acquired ſuch a preternatural thirſt as gives him much pain, unleſs by conſidering the important allotments of another life, the force and weight of them obviate that trouble-

troubleſome appetite, he will unavoidably indulge it. So the effects of religion upon our hearts may be accounted for mechanically as well as morally: and it highly recommends the uſe of conſideration to us, ſince without it nothing can be done to any good purpoſe.

It has been alledged, that man is not a free agent, becauſe he is neceſſarily determined by that which ſeems beſt to him at the time of his choice. But to this it is anſwered, that we are not always governed by that which appears beſt to us upon the whole, but by that which ſeems beſt for the particular occaſion; or in other words, that the ſtrongeſt preſent paſſion, whether it be the love of God or of the world, the fear of temporal or eternal evil, will rule and ſway us. But ſtill it is in our power, by a vigilant care and reſolute correction of ourſelves, to make what paſſion we pleaſe predominant. When ſin entices us, we can either ſhut out the thought of its pernicious effects, and plunge down the ſtream of pleaſure; or

even, if we do remember and know the greater evil it will produce, we often embrace it for the ſake of ſhunning a preſent pain; or we can reject it out of a horror of its conſequences, and a regard to God and goodneſs. It becomes us therefore to cleave to religion not only with our reaſon and underſtanding, but with our affections and will; to turn the main ſtream of our thoughts into that channel, and by deep conſideration to procure an awful ſenſe of its engagements, if we deſire to practiſe it with any pleaſure or tolerable ſucceſs. For though we are poſſeſſed of a liberty of choice, yet we are not ſo entirely free, but cuſtom will lay a biaſs upon us, and carry us which way it will; but then it is our buſineſs to accuſtom ourſelves to virtue, and to fall into ſuch a direction as may engage us on the ſide of happineſs, and conduct us to everlaſting ſalvation. "Now therefore thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, Conſider your ways."

From theſe words, abſtracted from the particular occaſion on which they were

delivered, and generally applied, I ſhall ſet before you the benefit of conſideration.

Conſideration is neceſſary to preſerve our innocence, and ſtill more ſo to bring us to repentance, and to reclaim us from an evil courſe: for in the latter caſe we cannot proceed evenly and ſmoothly on the road of duty, but find many difficulties in our way; ſo that in proportion to the trouble and conflict, more thought and attention is required.

And to prepare us for this good work, it will be obvious to us to conclude, that we ought to deny ourſelves the greateſt preſent pleaſure, whenever it would expoſe us afterwards to a much greater, a more violent and laſting pain; that though ſin ſhould pleaſe us ever ſo much in the enjoyment, yet ſince it brings us in danger of endleſs miſery, we ſhould fly from it as from a mortal enemy. And though repentance ſhould mortify us ever ſo ſeverely, yet ſince it muſt be done, or elſe we periſh; and ſince when it is accompliſhed,

pliſhed, it will yield us the peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs, and procure us an entrance into the joy of our Lord, 'tis reaſonable to ſubmit to the greateſt preſent pain for the ſake of ſuch happineſs in proſpect. To ſuch as believe the infinite rewards and puniſhments of another world, this argument carries in it the force of demonſtration; and it would powerfully operate upon us, it would not fail to produce ſome reformation in us, did we dwell upon it, and often lay it to heart.

'Tis by conſideration that we muſt come to a knowledge of the ſtate of our ſouls, to a ſight of our faults and defects, as well as of our good deeds, and ſo to an adjuſtment of our account with God. For thus we ſhall perceive what temptations have moſt power over us, and be jealous and watchful againſt their approaches for the future; what are the ſtrongeſt motives with us to perſeverance in duty, and revolve them long and often in our minds; wherein we have moſt offended, and there eſpecially to bewail our ſinfulneſs; and what are the

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weak parts of our virtue, where the foe moſt eaſily finds acceſs, and to ſet a guard to ſtrengthen thoſe avenues. Thus may we correct what is amiſs, and be more careful to preſerve ourſelves unſpotted for the future.

And becauſe what is left to be done at any time, is generally neglected and not done at all, prudence requires us to ſet apart ſome particular times for the ſettling our ſpiritual accounts; ſuch as the returns of a ſacrament, or rather every Lord's day; when the reſt from bodily labour gives all men leiſure and opportunity in a ſolemn manner to look over the actions of the week, to balance the good and evil they have done, to ſee whether they have improved in virtue or loſt ground, and ſo to give God the glory, or to humble themſelves by contrition. By theſe means they will come with prepared minds to public worſhip, and with a reverential awe of that Majeſty they approach; they will offer to God an acceptable ſervice, and profit by what they hear, receiving the

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ſeed into a devout heart, that ſoil which will produce an hundredfold.

There is not indeed a greater preſervative from ſin, nor a better remedy for guilt, than frequently to "conſider our ways," and to put but a ſhort ſpace between the examinations of our conduct; for ſo we ſhall be afraid to tranſgreſs, knowing the penance that it will ſoon coſt us in after-thought: our conſcience being kept awake by exerciſe, and the day of reckoning in our view, we ſhall dread to incur that pain which iniquity coſts a well-diſpoſed mind. The laſt judgment does not affect us ſo much as it ought, becauſe it ſeems at a diſtance; we make a ſhift to forget it, or to regard it but ſlightly and curſorily. The influence we ſee it have upon a dying man, is indeed irreſiſtible, for he cannot help conſidering himſelf as one that will be quickly placed before God, to give an account of himſelf in that awful preſence, and to receive a ſentence of happineſs or miſery, which the final audit will increaſe, but not abro-

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gate or diſannul: he bethinks himſelf therefore with what face he ſhall appear, lays hold on the merits of Chriſt by faith and repentance, and cloaths himſelf with humility: he breathes nothing but the ſpirit of prayer, ſpends his time in acts of ſubmiſſion and holy reſolution, bids adieu to the petty intereſts of this world, and ſcarce admits a thought but the momentous concerns of futurity. Now, would we but be aſſiduous to make this moving ſcene, this efficacious lecture of a good life, equally preſent to our minds, in the days of health and proſperity, it would not be leſs available to the amendment of our morals.

Let conſcience ſupply the place of ſickneſs, and it will be as faithful a monitor; and if we hearken to its counſels now, we ſhall be in leſs danger of relapſing into an evil courſe, than if we made our vows in the diſtreſs and anguiſh of our ſouls; we may be better ſatisfied of our ſincerity, and have greater comfort in turning to God: for thoſe that do not reſolve to be religious, till ſome terrible viſitation overtakes them,

generally fall back into their former careleſs way of living, when God has removed his afflicting hand, and grow unmindful of thoſe good purpoſes that were extorted from them by the rod. Conſideration will bring the things of eternity, that are future and unſeen, near to us, and help us to behave in the ſame manner, as if we were actually converſant in the inviſible world; on every emergency it will recall to our minds the inſpection of his eye, who is "about our path and about our bed, and ſpieth out all our ways;" and put us upon comporting ourſelves with ſuch regularity and decorum, as if we beheld the face of his glory, as if we perceived the ſtreams of his bleſſing deſcend upon the upright, and the frowns of his wrath ready to deſtroy the ungrateful and diſobedient. For ſince we are ſure that he ſees and obſerves us, why ſhould we not be as cautious of offending him, as if the Godhead were viſible to our naked eye. To ſupply the place of his own judgment for the preſent, he has ſet up in our breaſts the private tribunal of conſcience; and if we would

would not be aſhamed before him at his coming, nor covered with confuſion at his public and grand aſſize, we muſt hearken to the juſt verdict, and obey the impartial voice of this ſubſtitute now.

If we caſt away all ſerioufneſs, and ſin on without thought, the guilt will grow old and rankle in our minds. He that neglects for many years to humble himſelf for his ſins, when he would be diſpoſed to do better, is oppreſſed with their increaſing weight much more than one that has recollected his ways, and exerciſed himſelf in godly ſorrow, as he went along. He cannot help himſelf, and he has made the great phyſician of ſouls his adverſary, by an obſtinate contempt of his aſſiſtance. His mind is not compoſed enough to procure ſuch a ſight of his ſins, as is neceſſary to a regular repentance. All he can do is, to grieve as much, and be as diligent as poſſible to forſake the evil of his way. And if this be performed in the time of health, when he may teſtify the ſincerity of his heart by his future beha-

viour, it will without doubt be graciouſly accepted. But thoſe that are uſed to live without any care for their ſouls, and to indulge themſelves in thoughtleſs ſecurity, ſeldom begin to conſider, till they are awakened from their fatal ſleep by ſickneſs, and deſtruction flaſhes full in their faces.

This is the unfitteſt time for ſo great and difficult a work, when they are ſick and weak, and the vigour of their faculties is gone. If ſickneſs happens to overpower their reaſon and ſenſes, then is "the night indeed come, when no man can work." Or if their underſtanding ſhould remain to them, yet their pain is perhaps ſo ſharp and clamorous, that they cannot look over the actions of their lives with any application of mind, nor deplore their miſcarriages without the greateſt interruption and confuſion. Or if they ſhould be able to lament their ſins, 'tis hardly to be hoped that God will allow this late return, or accept this lame offering, the refuſe of thoſe days, in which they find no pleaſure. Should they however be pardoned, they cannot have the comfort of it, but muſt depart out of life in the great-

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eſt horror and anxiety. To repent indeed, even then, is the beſt thing they can do, the only plank they can lay hold of in that tempeſtuous ocean, and I leave it to have all the effect that a merciful God can allow.

But certainly we who have time before us, and ſufficient ability through the divine grace to do our duty, ſhould not be willing to run ſo deſperate a riſque, but ſtudy without delay to make our calling and election ſure; that we may not be ſurprized into ruin, nor ſummoned at unawares to anſwer the charge of our judge; that our lamps may conſtantly burn bright, that we may reaſonably expect a bleſſing to our portion, and enjoy the eaſe of a ſteady and compoſed mind.

If men will not think on their ways at preſent, and turn their feet unto the teſtimonies of God, while they may do it with aſſurance of pardon, and enjoy the ſatisfaction of a thorough change; let them remember, that the time will come when conſideration will be forced upon them, when they muſt drink the bitter draught,

not as a medicine perhaps, but only as a poiſon. When ſome great calamity falls upon them, as the approach of poverty, or ſome grievous ſickneſs, when their companions in vanity can no longer divert them, and all the arts of amuſement periſh; then thought and penſiveneſs will take place, conſcience will ſet their miſdeeds in array againſt them, and preſs them with a heavier load than all their external pain: it will take revenge of them for their former neglects of its warnings, and ſcourge them moſt ſeverely now, when they are leaſt able to bear its fury. They will abominate thoſe ſins as the cauſes of all their miſery, which they once looked upon as trifles not worth regarding, and abhor themſelves for their fooliſh inadvertency. Or if we can ſuppoſe that any perſons ſhould be ſo ſtupified againſt all ſenſe of guilt in ſuch melancholy circumſtances, as to feel no pain from theſe reflections, or not to reflect at all; yet when they come to die, when they are entered into another world, and ſee all the threatnings of the goſpel verified, and the vengeance of his wrath deſcending upon them,

them, they will then conſider when it is too late, when they perceive themſelves undone by their ſupineneſs and neglect. 'Tis ſaid of the rich glutton in the goſpel, that "in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments," as if he had never bethought himſelf before. And doubtleſs it will be the greateſt aggravation of all the ſorrows of thoſe unhappy ſpirits, to conſider that they laboured for their own ruin, that they would not liſten to any call of grace, but wilfully and reſolutely eſtranged themſelves from God.

I am the more urgent with you to the performance of this duty, becauſe it is an unpleaſing taſk; but yet not half ſo unpleaſing and diſagreeable as the evil conſequences of inconſideration, which I have ſet before you. Thoſe that are diſpoſed to examine their ways, in order to the amendment of them, for the more ſolemn and profitable doing of it, would do well to ſet before them ſome ſhort ſummary of the divine laws, of their duty to God, their neighbour, and themſelves, that they may queſtion themſelves upon every article;

where they have not offended, to give thanks to God for it; and where they have tranſgreſſed or neglected, to conſider with what circumſtances of aggravation they have done ſo, that they may confeſs themſelves particularly to almighty God, reſolve to be more watchful for the future againſt thoſe failings that moſt eaſily beſet them, and be ſtrengthened by the divine grace and abſolution.

Let us then all "remember, and ſhew ourſelves men," by bringing our tranſgreſſions again to mind. To be ſorry for our ſins, and to acknowledge our iniquity, is the leaſt we can do; and nothing is more ſuitable to a rational creature, than to foreſee the evil of ſin at a diſtance, and to avoid it. "Let us not deſpiſe the riches of the divine forbearance and long ſuffering, but know that the goodneſs of God leadeth us to repentance." For the judge of all the earth will juſtly declare that "he is clean from the blood of all men, and that thy deſtruction O Iſrael, is of thyſelf."

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SERMON VII.

The Vanity of worldly Things, a ſtrong Motive for repoſing our Hopes on Divine Providence.

PSALM xxxix. 6, 7.

Surely every man walketh in a vain ſhew: ſurely they are diſquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who ſhall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.

TO make theſe ſerious words effectual to the purpoſes, for which the Holy Spirit deſigned them, I ſhall, firſt, conſider the ſhortneſs and vanity of worldly happineſs, "man walketh in a vain ſhew, and diſquieteth himſelf in vain."

In the next place I ſhall ſhew the folly of an anxious heaping up of riches, in as much as "we know not who ſhall gather them."

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And laſtly, I ſhall ſhew what uſe we ought to make of afflictions and diſappointments, to be taught thereby to put our truſt in God only, and fix our hope in him.

Firſt, I am to conſider the ſhortneſs and vanity of worldly happineſs, expreſſed in theſe words, "man walketh in a vain ſhew, and diſquieteth himſelf in vain."

We are born into the world weak and defenceleſs; and we grow up, ſubject to numberleſs caſualties; and during our whole lives are perpetually expoſed to trouble and danger, which cannot be foreſeen nor yet prevented. The weakneſs and imperfections of childhood, the vanity and follies of youth, the cares and ſolicitudes of manhood, the uneaſineſs and infirmities of age, cloſely ſucceed each other. In each of theſe ſtates we are continually obnoxious to pains and diſeaſes of body; and in moſt of them to the acuter torments of anxiety and vexations of mind. All which evils are increaſed by what is commonly called the accidents and misfortunes

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of the world, by our own negligences and vices, whereof diſtreſſes and miſery are the moral conſequences. Man is chaſtened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with ſtrong pain.

The ſcripture compares the vanity and ſhortneſs of human life, to "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away;" and admoniſheth us that "man who is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble: he cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth alſo as a ſhadow, and continueth not." Jacob complained that "few and evil had the days of the years of his pilgrimage been;" and yet he far exceeded the uſual meaſure of the preſent age, and enjoyed much larger poſſeſſions than the generality of mankind. This ſhortneſs and vanity of human life, is ſo obvious to every man's experience, that it ſeems needleſs to remind the children of men of what they cannot but know. And yet ſo it happens, that the evident certainty of the thing, is the reaſon why men never attend to it, but

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live as if they knew it not. It requires no reaſoning, no arguing, no meditation, to convince men that they muſt ſhortly die; and yet for this cauſe, though without any reaſon, they put away the thoughts of it, as too trivial and obvious, and live as if it would never happen.

This ſingle thought, that God governs the world, if we endeavour ſincerely to do our duty, is a conſideration ſufficient to ſupport us under all the miſeries and vanities of the world. For, tho' we could not diſcover why he made us thus, nor the reaſon of our afflictions, the ways of his providence being inextricable, and his judgments unſearchable; yet any reaſonable and conſiderate mind will think it prudent and ſafe to truſt and rely upon infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. That power which in the frame of the natural world has adjudged all things by weight and meaſure; that power, which with exquiſite art made every thing to conſpire regularly and uniformly towards compleating the beautiful fabric of the material univerſe; that power then

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ſhould ſurely in his government of the moral world, in his diſpoſing of intelligent rational creatures, even tho' we could give no account of his ways, be believed by us to direct all things for the beſt, in order to bring about the nobleſt and moſt excellent ends: eſpecially as in this dark ſtate our finite underſtandings are able to diſcern many wiſe and uſeful deſigns, in the ſevereſt and moſt difficult diſpenſations of his providence. We have therefore great reaſon to ſubmit, not only with patience and reſignation, but with joy and ſatisfaction, to his good pleaſure; firmly believing that all things will at the great day, when the whole counſel of God ſhall be more perfectly diſcloſed, appear to be moſt wiſe, good and gracious.

Not only the thoughts of a future ſtate, but ſeveral conſiderations with reſpect to this, ſhew the vanity of worldly happineſs, and the folly of an anxious heaping up of riches, in as much as we know not who ſhall gather them: which is the next point to be conſidered.

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A favourite ſon, whoſe fortune we have with much ſolicitude been rearing, or laying the foundation for, may die untimely, die before us; and then all our thoughts, as well as his, with reſpect to the concerns of this world, periſh. What is worſe, he may live to plunge in vice, the rather in all probability becauſe he has been a favourite, and conſequently made good for nothing. For, the very notion that he may do what he pleaſes unpuniſhed, will make him diſobedient, undutiful, ungracious, or careleſs, obſtinate and vicious. Where will then be the fruit of our days of care, and nights of watching, when we have with many tender apprehenſions nurſed up an unnatural viper that will ſting us to death?

Perhaps, we may hope better things from a daughter, from an only child, by reaſon of the natural modeſty of the ſex, and the greater reſtraints they are uſed to live under. But what if ſhe be cut off in the flower of her age? What if ſhe be corrupted by ſome inſinuating villain, who

deaf to all the calls of reaſon and humanity, robs her of her virtue, her peace, her honour, and leaves her to be covered with ſhame and confuſion, to herd with the profligate and abandoned, or to die broken-hearted, it may be, diſtracted? How will ſuch a man be able to ſatisfy his conſcience? how will he be able to look up to God for pardon, who has rejected the petition of a perſon that lived in his ſmiles, and died by his ſcorn?

But ſuch a wretch will plead hard, not only for the excuſe, but the juſtification of his crime. 'Tis not robbery or murder, will he ſay, that I have committed; I have only gratified my appetite, which nature would never have given me, if it had not been to be gratified. Falſe and perverſe arguing this! as if religion had not given full ſcope to virtuous love; as if a wiſe and ſufficient proviſion were not made for the natural appetites of men in marriage! Becauſe he does not ſteal, or take away a man's life, he thinks he is not guilty of any great crime; as if the robbing an innocent

nocent and unſuſpecting virgin, already conquered with love, and confiding in his ſincerity, of her beſt portion, and delivering her over to diſgrace never to be repaired, perhaps to death too, were not a greater injury, a more flagrant piece of injuſtice, than the taking away the moveables of a houſe, or a little money.

For of what value is life protracted in diſhonour, and ſtript of it's greateſt comforts? Bring the caſe home to theſe debauchees, to a ſiſter or daughter of their own, and they ſhall reſent the injury with the utmoſt violence.

But from the conſideration of the vanity of laying up riches without meaſure, and without end, and not knowing who ſhall gather them, I paſs on to the principal thing intended, to ſhew what uſe we ought to make of afflictions and diſappointments, viz. To be taught thereby to put our truſt in God only, and fix our hope in him.

And here we may conſider, that many of thoſe things which we uſually eſteem

among the troubles and afflictions of life, are ſuch as muſt be reſolved into the abſolute ſovereignty and dominion of God. Of this kind are mortality and the ſhortneſs of human life; the unequal diſtribution of riches, honour, and temporal things; the different capacities and abilities, the different tempers and conſtitutions, the different ſtates and conditions of men in the world. For infinite power, wiſdom and goodneſs, may diſplay itſelf in producing what variety of creatures he pleaſes; and in communicating his free bounties in what meaſure and proportion he thinks fit, without giving any account of his ways. It is no juſt ground of complaint in men, that they were not created angels; any more than it is an injury to inferior creatures, that they are not endued with the capacities of men. We have all more reaſon to be thankful for what we have, than to be diſpleaſed for what we have not. It is ſufficient, if in matters of rewards and puniſhments, God in the end deals equally with all his rational creatures, and diſpoſes of each of them, according to the proportion

of their ſeveral deſerts in their reſpective ſtations. It was juſt, that the ſervant who gained four talents by the improvement of two, ſhould be rewarded with four cities; and that the reward of ten cities ſhould be allotted to him, who had improved five talents to ten. But why the one ſhould be intruſted with five, and the other but with two, no other account can be given, than that it is lawful for God to do what he pleaſes with his own. "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the ſame lump to make one veſſel to honour, and another to diſhonour?" The inſpired writer does not mean, that one perſon is unconditionally appointed to final happineſs, and another to miſery; but "as in a great houſe, there are not only veſſels of gold and ſilver, but alſo of wood and earth, and ſome to honour, and ſome to diſhonour;" ſo hath not the maſter a right to employ his ſervants in what ſtations he pleaſes, more or leſs honourable? provided, in his final diſtribution, he deals equitably with each of them, in their ſeveral and reſpective degrees.

Poverty

Poverty has not always the nature of an affliction or judgment, but is rather a ſtate of life appointed by the Almighty, for the proper trial and exerciſe of the virtues of contentment, patience and reſignation. The ſame may be obſerved as to want of honour and power, want of children or the loſs of them, weakneſs of body, ſhortneſs of life, and the like; nay, and even of ſpiritual diſadvantages; want of capacity and good underſtanding, want of knowledge and inſtruction, and of many opportunities and improvements which others enjoy. None of which are juſt ground of complaint againſt God, or any reaſon why we ſhould not acquieſce in his divine good pleaſure; ſince all theſe things are only different diſtributions of ſuch free gifts, as God not being obliged to beſtow on any man, he may divide to every man in what meaſure and proportion he thinks fit.

But this we may depend upon, that in ſuch meaſure only will God exact our duty, as he enables us to perform it; and "that to whom little is given, of him ſhall not much

be required." And this brings all the ſeeming inequality in the world, to a real equality at laſt; ſo "that he who gathers much hath nothing over, and he that gathers little has no lack."

Again; let us conſider, that a great part of the troubles of life, and the afflictions we complain of, are not the immediate appointment of God, but the mere natural effects and conſequences of our ſins. This conſideration alone ought to make us acquieſce with all humility and patience, under that burden, which we, and not God, have brought upon us. "For why ſhould a living man complain, a man for the puniſhment of his ſins?" Why ſhould he murmur againſt God, when he eateth but the fruit of his own ways, and is filled only with the natural conſequences of his own devices? very unreaſonably and unjuſtly this. For, if poverty be the effects of extravagance, profuſeneſs, and riotous living; if pain and diſeaſes of body, be the effects of debauchery and intemperance; and the comforts of age be prevented by the

the follies of youth; if anxiety and vexation of mind be the vanity of covetouſneſs, of whoſe labour there is no end, neither is it's eye ſatisfied with riches; ſuch troubles as theſe cannot be complained of as proceeding from the hand of God, but are the natural effects of men's own folly. "For they who plow wickedneſs ſhall reap iniquity, and they who ſow iniquity ſhall reap vanity." And yet even theſe afflictions may by a wiſe improvement, and by behaving diſcreetly under them, become the occaſion of much religious advantage. Theſe are a few of the many conſiderations, which ought to oblige us in all circumſtances of life, readily to acquieſce in the good pleaſure of God. There are others which are grounds not only of ſubmiſſion, but even of thankfulneſs to God, for ſending afflictions greatly to our advantage.

One end which God propoſes herein, is to teach us humility, and a juſt ſenſe of our own unworthineſs. Though nothing is more abſurd and unnatural, than for duſt

and aſhes to be lifted up againſt its Maker; though nothing is more ridiculous and unreaſonable, than for man, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils, to deſpiſe and behave inſolently towards his brother, who is of the ſame nature and dignity, and of like paſſions with himſelf; yet in fact ſo it is. And the only proper preſervative againſt, and effectual remedy for this evil, is, that mixture of afflictions, which by the wiſe appointment of providence, brings men to a right ſenſe of themſelves, and their dependance upon God, and is therefore called the "diſcipline and inſtruction of the Lord."

Another end of God's ſending afflictions and troubles upon us, is, to lead us to repentance for our paſt errors. When a man proſpers in all his worldly affairs, and his deſigns are crowned with perpetual ſucceſs; when all his appetites are gratified with the conſtant enjoyment of eaſe and pleaſure; he is too apt to forget God, and conſiders not that for all theſe things he will call him into judgment. The ſilent inſtruction of reaſon and

and true wiſdom, the ſoft voice of God in the gentle admonitions of conſcience, is not ſufficiently attended to. But "when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, then the inhabitants of the world will learn righteouſneſs."

Another end of God's ſending afflictions, is, to wean us from an over-fond love of the preſent world. There is nothing that more hinders men's progreſs in the divine life, and religion, or cools the zeal even of well-diſpoſed perſons, than a conſtant habitual enjoyment of the pleaſures of life. For this reaſon God ſeldom makes his beſt ſervants moſt proſperous in this world. And yet afflictions have alſo their temptations to impatience, diſcontent and complaining againſt God; and proſperity, if well employed, may produce excellent virtues. For "bleſſed is the rich that is found without blemiſh, and hath not gone after gold." Let us not then be ſolicitous after either ſtate, but with all ſubmiſſion leave that intirely to God; who knows much better than we what is convenient for us. Let

us not imagine, that whoever is much afflicted muſt conſequently be very wicked, and that God is angry with him. Indeed, when a man's conſcience can apply his affliction to his own ſins, it is juſt and reaſonable he ſhould accept it as the puniſhment of ſin, and as an argument to repentance; but he muſt by no means make another man's affliction an occaſion of cenſuring his neighbour. For the ſcripture declares, that happy is the man whom God correcteth; yea, "bleſſed is the man whom thou chaſteneſt, O Lord, and teacheſt him out of thy law." Let us, therefore, reſign ourſelves with all patience to the will of God, and rely upon him with full truſt and aſſurance, that he will finally direct all things to our beſt advantage. Let us, when greatly diſtreſſed, encourage ourſelves in the Lord our God, and ſay with the holy Pſalmiſt, "Now Lord, what wait I for? Truly my hope is in thee."

SER-

SERMON VIII.

Religious Wiſdom the beſt Acquiſition.

PROVERBS iv. 7.

Wiſdom is the principal thing; therefore get wiſdom, and with all thy getting get underſtanding.

NEXT to the deſire of happineſs, there is ſcarce any ſtronger appetite ſubſiſting in the ſoul of man, than the love of truth.

This is a natural attachment, pleaſant to the ſoul, as light is to the eyes. Nay, thoſe who with the ſtrongeſt prejudices embrace and maintain a falſe opinion, embrace and maintain it under the appearance of truth. No man can approve a falſity, though for ſelfiſh views he may endeavour to defend it. This love of truth was very wiſely implanted in us by the author of our beings, becauſe our happineſs conſiſts in acting according to it. When we perform the duties

duties dictated by truth, that performance is evermore attended with a ſecret joy and ſelf-complacency. It is a pleaſure indeed, to know what the truth of our condition requires, and how we ought to conduct ourſelves towards God, and to one another; but it is a much greater pleaſure to practiſe it. "Wiſdom is the principal thing; therefore get wiſdom, and with all thy getting get underſtanding."

Before I proceed to ſhew what true wiſdom is, I ſhall briefly examine the pretenſions of ſome things which have unjuſtly laid claim to this title.

It is not a ſagacity in finding out the tempers and foibles of men, in knowing the abſtruſe ſchemes of policy, in laying our deſigns deep, or ſeeing farther than others; for all this may be mere cunning, it may be applied to evil purpoſes, to carry on ſelf-intereſted views, or to gain an unfair advantage of our neighbour.

It does not conſiſt in the knowledge of nature, in travelling the circuit of heaven,

and

and calling the ſtars by their names, in knowing the compoſition of the animate and inanimate creation, the curioſities of the earth, and the wonders of the deep; for though theſe things tend to acquaint us with the continual agency and comprehenſive providence of God; yet one may poſſibly know them all, ſo far as human ſcience extends, and yet neither be better nor happier for the knowledge.

True wiſdom does not conſiſt in the clearneſs of reaſoning, and a capacity to reduce a debate to an eaſy concluſion, by detecting the mazes of error, and the ſophiſtry of falſehood; nor yet in the powers of eloquence and the happy arts of perſuaſion. For they are comparatively but a few that can attain to theſe things; and yet, we are all commanded to "get wiſdom."

It is not a ſkill in the arts of government, nor the knowing how to rule a free, and therefore licentious and capricious people, in peace and affluence. For though theſe arts may qualify a man to be a father to kingdoms and a bleſſing to mankind,

yet

yet he might want the opportunity, the power, or the will to uſe them.

It is not even an accurate acquaintance with the laws of God and man, with the relation of things and perſons, to unlock the cabinet of truth, to explore the myſteries of providence, to explain dark prophecies, to know the will of God, nor even to teach it the admiring world.

No; whatever is calculated for the meridian of this world only, even the moſt perfect knowledge of the beſt rules of life, is not true wiſdom. It is theory, it is ſpeculation, it is learning; but if it ſtops here, and does not influence our practice, it is lighter than vanity itſelf. "The fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom, and to depart from evil, that is underſtanding." If our motives and meaſures of action take in only a part of our exiſtence, and extend not beyond the preſent ſcene of things, we are ultimately, and therefore moſt deplorably fooliſh. To what purpoſe is it to know the truth, and yet to live in error? He who is truly wiſe is "wiſe unto ſal-

vation." He ſees an eternity before him, and therefore meaſures all his conduct with a regard to that awful duration. Imagine yourſelf appointed to live a thouſand years on earth, in health and plenty, and tranquility of mind; how would you be raviſhed with the proſpect? Nay, even Hezekiah's poor fifteen years would often be a welcome reprieve at the hour of death. But what are a thouſand years of mortal pleaſure to an eternity of celeſtial happineſs, in which the wiſe man ſecures to himſelf a certain and indefeaſible inheritance? To be a lawgiver or commander, a philoſopher or an orator, are qualifications which ſubſiſt only on this ſide the grave; but to be an humble lover and devout worſhipper of God, to be juſt and charitable, to be pure and temperate, are virtues which will follow us into the allotments of eternity. The wiſe man is not careful about trifles, is not earneſt for the low gratifications of ſenſe, which to him will ſoon be no more, nor ſtudious to ſatisfy his periſhable body; his principal object is the one thing needful, and he lives (becauſe he really is ſo) as a candidate for heaven.

True

True Wiſdom ſatisfies us that we are in the right road to happineſs, and ſo prevents all the trouble of doubt and uncertainty. While the ſoul of man is perplexed or undetermined in its choice, it proceeds every ſtep with fear, and faulters in all its motions. With what courage can a man proceed in a way, whoſe end perhaps may be woe and bitterneſs? With what pleaſure can a man purſue his journey, when he has neither confidence in his paſſage at preſent, nor his reception at the laſt? Every man muſt look forward ſometimes into futurity; but with what anxiety and confuſion muſt he do it, who knows that he lives only as a man of this world. It muſt be no little pain to a man to have no certain proviſion for the preſent life, how much more if he has made none for a ſtate of immortality? All this uneaſineſs true wiſdom removes: for as it is the exerciſe of the beſt reaſon, it cannot but be agreeable to a rational creature. He who follows its directions will be chearful and eaſy in all his proſpects. He is ſecure of the preſent favour and of the future enjoy-

ment of the ſupreme good. He is conſcious that he has the beſt end in view, and purſues it by the beſt means, and therefore he may be in reaſonable hopes of ſucceſs. The due application of proper means naturally produces a good effect; and the providence of God is particularly concerned to ſecond his endeavours, and to bring them ſooner or later to a happy concluſion. This lays a good foundation for hope; and hope will ſweeten all his labours, will give him ſtrength to encounter difficulties, and freſh vigour to climb up the aſcent of virtue.

True wiſdom will teach us to be eaſy even under ill ſucceſs, and to bear a diſappointment with patience. For if we have uſed ſuch prudent meaſures as it ſuggeſted, and have proſecuted them with proportionable diligence, our hearts have nothing to reproach us with, tho' we fail in our deſigns. And though the labour we have laid out in a good cauſe ſeems to be ſpent in vain, yet it really is not ſo: for God, who ſees and remembers it, will one day make us an ample

ple recompence. And what great pain can a diſappointment give us, when we are ſure that the leſs reward we receive for our good works here, the greater ſhall be our reward hereafter? Were we never to enter upon any great or good deſign, except we were ſure it would not be fruſtrated, we muſt generally ſit down in an unprofitable inactivity. The change of men's tempers, the alteration of circumſtances, or the malignity of the ſeaſons, which eſcape the quickeſt foreſight, oftentimes blaſt the beſt-laid plan of action. But if we have propoſed to ourſelves the glory of God and the benefit of mankind as our end, "he who ſeeth in ſecret and knows the heart," will reward us not only for what we have done well, but alſo for our good intentions, though they have miſcarried here. "For there is a crown of glory laid up for all who have fought the good fight, who have finiſhed their courſe, and kept the faith: And this the power of men cannot wreſt out of the hand of the righteous judge, but he will give it to all thoſe that love his appearing."

True

True wiſdom will teach us to bear all the troubles and afflictions of life with decency and a due compoſure of mind. 'Tis fancy and a diſordered imagination which greatly increaſes the ſize of our misfortunes, and makes our afflictions more bitter. If we labour under pains of body, imagination aggravates them by adding to them the terrors of approaching death, or magnifying the pleaſures of life, which ſickneſs diſqualifies us to taſte. If we ſuffer under external adverſities by caſualties and loſſes, imagination repreſents to us that we are now no longer able to arrive at that eaſy fortune and plentiful ſubſiſtence which we had long propoſed to ourſelves. If we ſuffer under diſgrace or the contempt of the great, imagination ſhews us the path to diſtinction ſhut up, and all the views of ambition cut off. But true wiſdom corrects the power of imagination. It informs us, that if bodily pains laſt long, they will be tolerable, and mixt with intervals of eaſe; and it takes occaſion from them to ſhew us the vanity of the world, and to raiſe our affections to things above: but

if thoſe pains be very violent, true wiſdom ſuggeſts, they will alſo be very ſhort, will ſoon put a period to our life and themſelves together; and that they open us a paſſage to a ſtate "where there is no more pain nor ſorrow nor crying." A wiſe man does not much wiſh to die, becauſe he knows how to be uſeful in life; nor does he much fear death, becauſe he has prepared for it.

Wiſdom will farther inſtruct us, that as there is no bound to luxury, nor any end of the cravings of a vicious appetite, ſo the real neceſſities of life are very few, and ſoon and eaſily ſatisfied; that a plain diet contributes more to health than all the delicacies of profuſion, and that a plain habit will keep us as warm, and defend us againſt the injuries of the weather, as well as gold and purple. It will farther inſtruct us, that the inſults and indignities which we may receive undeſervedly from proud and fooliſh men are to be very little regarded; that we need not abide by their judgment; and that their injurious treatment of us reflects the greateſt

diſhonour upon themſelves. And what is the thing which the world calls honour. It is a title, a mark, a name, which creates an imaginary diſtinction between a creature that is born to death and frailty, and the reſt of his fellow-mortals. Thus by removing imaginary evils, groundleſs fears and unneceſſary cares, wiſdom qualifies us to enjoy the ſolid comforts of life with greater and more uninterrupted pleaſure.

The even tenor, the conſiſtent and harmonious ſcheme of a wiſe and good man's conduct is lovely in the eyes of all beholders. Folly is capricious and impertinent, inconſiſtent and unequal, unſeemly and diſguſtful, but the agreeable uniformity of wiſdom commands veneration from every eye. Virtue, if it meets with no other reward, is however commonly allowed its due praiſe. It contributes ſo much to the benefit of ſociety, that to cenſure it is juſtly accounted a treaſonable attempt againſt the public good. A wiſe man will converſe inoffenſively in the world, and give no juſt

occaſion of anger, of ſtrife or malice. Even bad men will forbear to ſpeak ill of him, leſt they ſhould ſeem to be enemies to virtue itſelf. As a friend, he is a treaſure to every one that finds him; ſince he is not governed by humour, but acts upon principle.

True wiſdom will teach us to know ourſelves, and to form an exact judgment of our own ſtrength and weakneſs. The fooliſh man is very little acquainted with his own heart; and forms a falſe judgment of his own abilities. But wiſdom will give us juſt notions of our own powers, and ſhew us wherein our chief ſtrength conſiſts. Theſe, it will teach us to exert in a proper manner and with due activity, and while we diligently follow the buſineſs or ſtudies for which we have a capacity, to leave other things intirely to men who have talents for them. 'Tis no diſpraiſe to us to be unfit for certain employments; and we only deſerve reproach when we purſue what we are unfit for. Every man has his proper talent from na-

ture, if he would but carefully conſider what it is, and might do well if he would but purſue the method which that points out to him. There is indeed one talent, and that the moſt valuable, which is univerſal, I mean the grace of God, which both may and ought to be improved by all men. For without this improvement, other qualifications, whatever price the world may ſet upon them, will be nothing worth.

The divine gifts, which belong to the preſent ſcene of things, are beſtowed variouſly, to anſwer the different neceſſities of human life, but the means of ſalvation are common to us all. And it is the buſineſs of wiſdom to direct all our operations to that great and ſupreme end, that we may ſo converſe with things temporal as not finally to loſe the things eternal. Hence we ſhall alſo learn our weakneſſes and defects, and to walk humbly with our God. We ſhall not aim at high things above our ſize, but move contentedly in our proper ſphere, and become uſeful to mankind in the part allotted to us. We ſhall obſerve

in what duty we are moſt liable to fail, and there place the ſtrongeſt guard; what temptations are wont to overcome us, and avoid them.

Laſtly, true wiſdom will recommend us to the favour of God, and procure us an ineſtimable reward from him. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wiſdom. Glorious is the fruit of good labour, and the root of wiſdom ſhall never fall away. "Happy is the man that findeth wiſdom: whoſo findeth her findeth life, and ſhall obtain favour of the Lord." And indeed it cannot be otherwiſe; for wiſdom is a ray of that original perfection which dwells in the divinity; it is of a pure and ſpiritual nature, and cannot but be agreeable to that being, who comprehends all truth, and always acts according to it. All wiſdom cometh from the Lord, and is with him for ever. The word of God moſt high is the fountain of wiſdom, and her ways are everlaſting commandments. He created her, and ſaw her, and numbered her, and poured her

her out upon all his works. Wiſdom leads us to the performance of our duty to God, and makes us cultivate every grace which is pleaſing in his ſight. "The fear of the Lord is wiſdom and inſtruction;" and faith and meekneſs are his delight. The fear of the Lord is fulneſs of wiſdom, and filleth men with her fruits. The fear of the Lord is a crown of wiſdom, making peace and perfect health to flouriſh, both which are the gifts of God; it enlargeth their rejoicing that love him, and exalteth them to honour that hold it faſt. Wiſdom is the mother of fair love, and fear, and knowledge, and holy hope. Come unto her, all ye that be deſirous of her, and fill yourſelves with her fruits. For her memorial is ſweeter than honey, and her inheritance than the honey comb. They that eat her ſhall yet be hungry, and they that drink her ſhall thirſt for her ſtill. "Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace."

SERMON IX.

The Reaſonableneſs of Rejoicing in Religion.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I ſay, Rejoice.

'TIS no little recommendation of the laws of God, that the performance of them is attended with the greateſt ſatisfaction and moſt durable pleaſure, while the tranſgreſſion of them produces an uneaſy ſenſation of being wrong, and the painful impreſſions of guilt and fear. So agreeable are the divine commands to the natural ſuggeſtions of our reaſon, and the pureſt dictates of our underſtanding. Nor is obedience only in general a bleſſed thing, but ſo gracious is our heavenly Father, ſo much does he conſult the good of mankind,

kind, that he hath enjoined us expreſly and frequently in his word, "to rejoice," to poſſeſs ourſelves of a chearful and eaſy temper, that can delight itſelf in his favours, in oppoſition to a querulous murmuring ſpirit, to a gloomy and fretful frame of mind. "Let the righteous rejoice before God (ſaith the pſalmiſt), yea let them exceedingly rejoice;" and in the text (ſays the apoſtle) "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I ſay, Rejoice."

One would indeed almoſt think that this precept were needleſs, ſince every man's chief aim is the attainment of joy; or at leaſt that it would never be diſobeyed, ſince there is nothing more deſirable than a contented humour and a chearful diſpoſition, which is the very eſſence of pleaſure: he who indulges a diſguſt, or broods over his grief, ſins againſt his own ſoul.

So it ſeems; but if we look into the world, we ſhall find this injunction very ill complied with. For nothing is more common than to ſee people ſad and diſconſolate,

ſolate, repining at their lot, complaining of their circumſtances, angry at the affronts of men, and diffident of the divine providence. It is true, we may find enough rejoicing after a confuſed irregular manner, without any compaſs to direct them, or any ballaſt to keep them ſteady. In various falſe purſuits, many ſeek after joy, but few light on the path where it really is, till they have by experience found the emptineſs and inſincerity of other flattering proſpects. They ſeek it in the gifts of fortune; they hope for it in ſenſual enjoyments, they apply themſelves to baniſh care by indulging their paſſions, by gratifying their appetites, by the company of the diſſolute, and every form of riot. But theſe ways of rejoicing are unſucceſsful; they are nothing but ſhadows that elude the graſp, and diſappoint the expectation; they are flaſhes of pleaſure that fly away like lightning. They depend on cauſes very changeable, and reſide only in the fluid humours of the body, in the motion of the ſpirits, and the fickle imagination: even while they ſubſiſt, they are allayed

layed with pain; every little accident diſcompoſes them, they ſoon end in lothing, and leave nothing but languor and remorſe behind. For (as Solomon obſerved) "in ſuch laughter the heart is ſorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heavineſs." The uſual pleaſures of men are unreaſonable and extravagant, and impoſſible to be long retained. In ſhort, what way ſoever the ſoul of man ſhall turn itſelf, it can fix upon nothing adequate to its deſires and capacities but in God: thoſe are the only perſons who are bleſt with a conſtant flow of pleaſure, that "rejoice in the Lord."

Religion is not a ſullen thing (as ſome imagine it to be) that requires a moroſe and gloomy life, and forbids all mirth and good-humour; but it is the ſource of the pureſt and moſt uninterrupted joy, ſuch as riſes not by accident, breaks out in violent ſallies, and is no more, but ſprings from a never-failing principle of ſatisfaction in the heart. A joy that is as ſtable as the nature and reaſon of things

in which it is founded, that laſts as long as the immortal ſpirit in which it inheres, and the eternal objects that are its portion.

Thus excellent is the goodneſs of God, that he hath ſo modelled the frame of things, as to make our duty to be our pleaſure; and whatſoever hath a certain tendency to miſery and ſorrow, to be ſin to us; and hath contrived the inſtincts of our nature, ſo as to ſupport the intereſts of virtue. As he would have us reſemble him in every perfection, ſo in a ſteady courſe of happineſs; he has not only provided for us a heaven, a place of bliſs hereafter, but would allot us as great a ſhare of comfort as may be here.

The goſpel is "good tidings of great joy to all people;" and God repreſents himſelf therein as the God of love, of hope, of peace, of all conſolation; diſplaying the beams of his mercy; accepting the greateſt of returning ſinners in his well-beloved Son; inviting us to partake of the treaſures of his ſufficiency; and freely diſ-

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penſing the bleſſings of his grace, and ſalvation.

Our Saviour invites the weary and heavy laden to reſt and refreſhment; he promiſes to wipe away all tears from our eyes, to crown us with a bleſſed hope, and to admit his faithful ſervants into their Maſter's joy, which is full and complete in itſelf, and which no man can take from them. What is the kind aſſurance that he gave us a little before his departure; but the "ſending of another comforter, the Holy Spirit, that ſhould abide with us for ever;" to lighten and inſtruct, to calm and refreſh our hearts; to purify us with his holy flame, and give us an earneſt of his eternal inheritance? And what are the genuine fruits of his operation, but love, joy, and peace?

A good chriſtian therefore, as ſuch, is the moſt chearful and happy man in the world, well ſatisfied in his mind, light and free in his ſpirits, calm and cool in his breaſt, ſerene in his countenance, pleaſant

ſant in his ſpeech, compoſed in his behaviour, and well-aſſured in all his actions. No glooms and melancholy thought, no fierce deſire, or tumultuous paſſion dwells with him; frowardneſs or ill-nature is foreign to his heart, and if at any time it happens that a perſon really virtuous deviates from this character, and becomes gloomy and ill-tempered, he does injury to his profeſſion; he brings a blemiſh upon religion in the eyes of its adverſaries, who becauſe of his auſterity are more averſe to embrace it.

Severity of manners is either owing to a miſtake in judgment, or a miſcarriage in practice; either to a ſuperſtitious conceit that chriſtianity requires one to be a hermit, or elſe to the loſs of innocence. For, if a chriſtian does but conſider his ſtate and privileges, the dignity of his nature, his alliance to angels and to God, the greatneſs of his reward, and the certainty of the divine promiſes; if he does but reflect that heaven favours him, a good conſcience ſupports him, and that he is at

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peace with all the world; if he is duly ſenſible of the great honour God does him in calling him his friend, and adopting him for his ſon, ſurely he has reaſon to "rejoice evermore," to be perpetually in good humour.

He is not only in a happy condition, in a ſtate of ſalvation now, but ſince God will undoubtedly perform his part of the covenant; by his ſincerity and circumſpection he is ſecure of its continuance, and has the grateful proſpect of advancing ſtill farther towards the perfection of a moral agent, of "ſhining more and more till he arrives at the perfect day."

He hath God for his portion, who is the inexhauſtible fountain of good, and his affairs are entruſted to his moſt faithful hand; he hath free acceſs to his preſence, and is frequently delighted with the divine goodneſs, with the tender care of providence that often interpoſes in his behalf, with the ſublime exer-

exerciſes of devotion, and the dews of grace deſcending from above.

A true chriſtian labours not under any tormenting care, for he hath caſt all his care upon his heavenly Father, and depends upon his protection. His knees tremble not, nor does his heart beat with fear, for he firmly relies upon the defence and aſſiſtance of almighty power. He hath no deſpair to depreſs him into the pit of darkneſs, nor the ſting of guilty remorſe to perplex him; for he hath a ſure refuge in the divine mercy and the merits of Chriſt, applied to himſelf by faith and repentance. He is not diſquieted with any longing deſires, but concludes that beſt for him which heaven ſees fit to beſtow, and is ſatisfied with what he has farther to expect from thence. He is not pierced through with hatred, nor inflamed with ſtrife, knowing nothing here that is worth paſſionately contending for, and reſolving to preſerve a good-will for all men. How can he then chuſe but be free from ſorrow; how ſhall

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he not taſte every ſerene joy, every pure delight?

All that a chriſtian, as ſuch, is concerned with, is God and his Saviour, virtue and wiſdom, heaven and eternity; from theſe ſprings no bitter ſtreams, no vexatious paſſions can poſſibly flow.

Indeed, the natural fruit of every virtue is joy, and the practice of religion in general, gives birth to the moſt pleaſing reflections; but, to be a little more particular, we ſhould principally rejoice in faith, in hope, and in charity.

Faith, which is a full perſuaſion of the truth of the divine revelations, not only inſtructs us, but enlivens and animates us in our ſpiritual warfare; there being no article of faith, which does not imply ſome great advantage and benefit to us. What greater pleaſure than by faith to contemplate the riches of God's bounty, in the creation of ſo magnificent and well-furniſhed a world, for our uſe and ſervice;

to behold the ſame almighty hand and vigilant wiſdom, employed in governing and preſerving this beautiful fabric; to reflect on that ſum and comprehenſion of all bleſſings, God's ſending his Son from heaven, to become man, that we might be aſſumed into a participation of the divine nature, and communion with God?

It is faith that embraces thoſe great truths, ſo worthy of all acceptation, wherein God opens wide his arms to receive the penitent; propoſing the kindeſt overtures of mercy, upon the eaſieſt terms, and at the ſame time ſupplying us with aſſiſtance to perform them. And ſurely, if we are deeply ſenſible of our ſin and miſery, if we are humbled with an unfeigned contrition for our miſdeeds, it will be very comfortable to believe, that God will be fully reconciled to us, and that "we have an advocate with the Father, who is the propitiation for our ſins."

It is no little ſatisfaction to be fully perſuaded, that the great and precious promiſes

miſes of God will really be accompliſhed. How can a firm belief grounded upon the infallible word of God, that an eternal inheritance, a treaſure that cannot fail, a felicity beyond expreſſion is reſerved for ſincere obedience, how can it be deſtitute of complacency and joy?

And what greater refreſhment, or means of contentment can we have, than that faith, which is an abſolute reliance on divine providence; whether we be in proſperity or adverſity, without reſerve, to depend on his fatherly care, who looketh unto the ends of the earth. "Bleſſed is the man, who thus truſteth in the Lord, and whoſe hope the Lord is." For here he diſburdens all his cares and troubles, in confidence that his wants will be ſupplied, his grievances removed, and himſelf protected from all fatal dangers, by the Father of mercies and lover of ſouls.

Thoſe beneficial truths, thoſe propoſals of grace and mercy, and thoſe invaluable promiſes, which faith apprehends as true

in general, hope applies particularly to ourſelves. We muſt ſincerely examine our lives and hearts, by the laws of God, delivered in holy ſcripture; and if, upon an impartial ſcrutiny, we find that our conſcience condemns us not, as wilful tranſgreſſors of them, then have we confidence towards God, then may we cheriſh our hope, as "an anchor of the ſoul, both ſure and ſtedfaſt." Faith aſſures us, that God will receive all penitent ſinners, and crown every good chriſtian with glory; but hope whiſpers, that God will render to me the wages of righteouſneſs, will verify his good word to me his ſervant.

Certainly, this bleſſed hope, where it is entertained upon good grounds, upon the conſciouſneſs of having faithfully diſcharged our duty, muſt make us habitually well-pleaſed and joyful. All hope, in proportion to the worth of its object, and the ſolidity of its foundation, is comfortable, ſince it ſets before us abſent bleſſings, and gives us frequent foretaſtes of future enjoyments; but religious hope, that is built

on the rock of ages, and is a reaſonable expectation of immortal happineſs, far excels all other hope. Men are uſually much pleaſed with the thought of being near to greater acquiſitions, and plume themſelves in the fancy of a more elevated manner of life, when they ſhall have attained them, though death or other accidents may eaſily defeat their hope; how much rather ſhould the "lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reſerved in heaven for us," inſpire us with the greateſt chearfulneſs!

Laſtly, we ſhould rejoice in the practice of love and charity. Infinitely beyond all other things, God deſerves our affection, being moſt perfectly amiable in himſelf, and moſt kind and beneficent to us. By an original law of our nature, our ſouls cannot reſt, till they are ſtayed on him; they breathe after their author, and nothing leſs can ſatisfy their vaſt capacity, and boundleſs deſires. God is, moreover, moſt ready to impart himſelf, and will not reject any one that cometh to him; he even

courts our love, and condeſcends to apply to us firſt; for "we love him (ſaith the apoſtle) becauſe he firſt loved us." By the gracious influences of his Spirit, and the kindeſt expreſſions of favour, he encourages our affection; and while other things diſappoint the expectation, and fall ſhort of our pre-conceived opinion, he far exceeds it.

To this holy, this happy flame, charity towards men, is nearly allied; for it baniſhes all thoſe ſharp and turbulent paſſions, which darken our mind, and unhinge its frame; it ſettles us in a ſedate humour, in good order, in the harmony of peace. How god-like a pleaſure is it to do good! it produces in ourſelves the ſweeteſt diſpoſition, endears us to our brethren, makes us reſemble God, attracts his favour to us, and leads us to rejoice at laſt with joy unſpeakable and full of glory.

SERMON X.

On Submiſſion to the Supreme Being.

JAMES iv. 7.

Submit yourſelves therefore to God.

IT is a very melancholy conſideration to all thoſe who endeavour to promote the growth of piety, and deſire to ſee the kingdom of Chriſt eſtabliſhed in the hearts of the profeſſors of his religion, that ſo large a part of them live in the open and avowed tranſgreſſion of his laws, and have almoſt intirely wore off the ſenſe of a God and his providence from their minds. Many, are ſo much overwhelmed with ſenſual pleaſures, that they have neither leiſure nor inclination to attend to the obligations they are under, to perform a conſtant and univerſal obedience to the divine will. Many are ſo far infected with pride, and miſled by a vain imagination, that they

even glory in their ſhame; call their foolhardineſs, which enables them to rebel againſt God, by the name of courage; and think they are the only perſons in the world of brave and maſculine ſpirits, who are reſolved to aſſert their freedom of thought, and break off the fetters of laws and commandments. Theſe are ſo far from being drawn to their duty by "the cords of love," that they are not even kept to it by a reflection on God's infinite power and juſtice, but ſeem to be inſpired with a gigantic ambition, as impotent as it is execrable, to ſcale heaven, and ſeat themſelves above the throne of the moſt High.

Such as theſe, that in the words of the prophet, "call the proud happy, and ſay, that thoſe who work wickedneſs are ſet up, yea, they that tempt God are even delivered," will, without a ſpeedy repentance, be miſerably undeceived, by the wrath of that God, whoſe authority they refuſe to acknowledge: For then "ſhall they diſcern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that ſerveth God and

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him that ſerveth him not; for behold, the day cometh that ſhall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, ſhall be as ſtubble; and the day cometh that ſhall burn them up, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, that it ſhall leave them neither root nor branch."

Leaving theſe deſpiſers to the fruit of their own hands, let us ſee whether it be not needful for us all, frequently to renew our meditations on the ſubmiſſion we owe the Supreme Being. And doubtleſs, the beſt of us may obſerve the traces of primitive diſobedience in our hearts; "that law of our members which warreth againſt the law of our minds," cannot in this life be perfectly ſubdued. We are all of us too prone to forget the baptiſmal vow, to continue Chriſt's faithful ſoldiers and ſervants to our lives end; and when we ſeriouſly aſk our conſciences, what ſpiritual enemies we have ſubdued, what temptations we have baffled, what ground we have gained? I doubt we ſhall find that the enemy ſtill continues his hoſtilities on

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our frontiers, and that there is a party in our own boſoms but too well affected to him, that would in the day of battle deſert their colours and go over to his ſide; in a word, that we are very defective in our inſtances of homage to the King of kings.

This corruption and wrong bias of our nature, is taken notice of by the apoſtle, in the 5th verſe of this chapter: "Do ye think that the ſcripture ſaith in vain," *i. e.* falſely, "that the ſpirit which dwelleth in us luſteth to envy." Are we not all ſenſible of the wayward tendency of our unmortified deſires, and that carnal concupiſcence envies God the dominion he has over our ſouls, and thinks it could carve out to itſelf a better heaven than that he has propoſed, and could ſteer its courſe by more acceptable rules than thoſe that he has impoſed upon it? This depravation of heart is not to be remedied without the divine aſſiſtance, and therefore he adds in the next verſe, "but he giveth more grace;" *i. e.* in proportion as we are more averſe

averſe to good and inclined to evil, than in the ſtate of innocence, God is willing to afford us more plentiful effuſions of his holy Spirit than he then did. So the apoſtle goeth on, "wherefore he ſaith, (the Holy Ghoſt ſaith by the mouth of Solomon) God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." Theſe words are taken from Prov. iii. 34. where they ſtand thus, "Surely he ſcorneth the ſcorner, but giveth grace unto the lowly."

Now, by the ſcorner is meant ſuch a perſon as I deſcribed at the entrance of this diſcourſe, one that has ſuch an overweening conceit of his own abilities, that by degrees he forgets his dependance upon his Maker, till at laſt he comes to think he can go through with his ſchemes of vanity without taking him along with him; and therefore, ſince his views are ſo vicious, that the Deity can have no hand in them, and ſince he begins to ſay to God, "Depart from me, for I deſire not the knowledge of thy ways;" he has his wiſh, and the Holy Ghoſt, after ſo many repulſes,

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ceaſes to trouble him with any farther overtures of grace, which cannot poſſibly conſiſt with the corrupt and ſwelling heart of the ſcorner.

So neceſſary it is to walk humbly before God, that we quench not the holy flame of the Spirit, among whoſe fruits, meekneſs and patience, and lowlineſs of mind, are the moſt diſtinguiſhed; and that we may not by overlooking our defects, be rendered incapable of the increaſe of thoſe bleſſed influences, which he has graciouſly promiſed to a lowly temper. And therefore, St. James makes this concluſion from the two preceding verſes I have been explaining to you, and inculcates this divine virtue of reſignation and obedience to the Deity, in theſe words, "Submit yourſelves therefore to God."

Now God hath a juſt dominion over all, founded in his own infinite power. Every living creature, in conſequence of its being, is poſſeſſed of certain powers of action and thoſe powers of action are neceſſarily

neceſſarily proportionable to its nature and eſſence; that is, becauſe the creature's eſſence is finite, its activity muſt be finite and limited too. In like manner, as God's ſelf-exiſtence plainly implies that he is poſſeſſed of ſome power, ſo the infinity of that exiſtence cauſes that power to be infinite. Since, therefore, God has a power and authority infinitely ſuperior to that of all other beings whatſoever, and ſince he, as well as they, has a freedom to exerciſe his own abilities, they ſtand indiſpenſibly obliged to pay all manner of homage, they are capable of, to his Majeſty. Nor can it be objected, that God's infinite power does not entitle him to univerſal dominion, becauſe it may only be a power to do infinite miſchief; for God never exerts one of his attributes to the prejudice of another, but all his acts are conſiſtent with the unchangeable rectitude of his nature, and his ſuper-eminent holineſs is the rule of all his motions. Unleſs, therefore, we conceive God to be infinitely powerful in vain, we muſt allow him a right to diſpoſe of us as

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he pleaſes, and preſcribe to us what laws ſhall ſeem to him moſt meet.

But, though none but a downright atheiſt will deny the obligation we are under, to reſign ourſelves to the divine will, yet the generality of men are ſo taken up with the things of the earth, and have their minds ſo much debaſed with low and groveling deſires, that they take notice of little or nothing, but what comes within the compaſs of their ſenſes; and becauſe God, in his great mercy, does not give continual inſtances of his vengeance on thoſe that neglect his laws and refuſe to take his yoke upon them, they are apt to flatter themſelves that he will abate a great deal of his juſt rights and claim, and will not exert the fulneſs of his power in the puniſhment of thoſe that rebel againſt him.

This leads me to conſider another argument for ſubmiſſion to the divine will, deducible from the conſideration of God's omnipotent power, viz. that if we will not

not acknowledge his might, and the juſtice of his government, by proſtrating ourſelves before him, by reducing every ſtubborn deſire, and captivating every lawleſs thought to his obedience, his might and juſtice will be made to appear in our endleſs deſtruction. For if God has a right to command, he has without doubt, alſo a right to puniſh the breach of his commandments; to cruſh the ſpirit of pride and rebellion, and thruſt it down into the chambers of darkneſs, to herd among thoſe ambitious and reſtleſs beings, to whom it is ſo near akin; where rebellion ſtill ſtrives to break its fetters, and pride torments itſelf with a fruitleſs deſire of a freſh opportunity to oppoſe the Supreme Being.

Though men may cheriſh treaſon in their hearts againſt earthly princes, and by their ſecrecy eſcape their ſword, and the vengeance due unto the crime; it is not ſo when we have to do with God, for he ſees the firſt ſeeds of blaſphemy, and perceives the malignity of an arrogant and unbending temper of mind, though it be

concealed with the moſt dextrous hypocriſy. Beſides, though earthly princes muſt immediately proceed to the puniſhment of traitors as ſoon as diſcovered, for fear of being injured by them; yet the King of kings defers the full execution of his ſentence, againſt his diſobedient ſubjects, till the day of judgment, becauſe it is impoſſible for his throne to be ſhaken, or his empire endangered; and then ſhall he caſt thoſe wicked men who would not have him to reign over them, "into utter darkneſs, where ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing of teeth."

But what is a conſideration much more likely to work upon generous ſouls, is, that God's infinite power makes him capable infinitely to reward our ſubmiſſion and reſignation by uniting us to himſelf, and making us partakers of all his glory, that we may "reign with the Lamb as kings and prieſts for evermore." If we will but mortify our vanity here, where there is nothing worth our ambition, our higheſt deſires will be ſurmounted,

ed, when we ſhall be admitted to enter the new Jeruſalem, and to ſtand at the right-hand of God. For our gracious God has not implanted one paſſion in our nature, for which there is not a lawful object to exerciſe itſelf upon, nor one deſire for which he has not provided an adequate ſatisfaction. Thus he has given us an immenſe deſire of glory, to the end, that finding the emptineſs and uncertainty of all earthly honour, we may chearfully ſubmit to his power, which will beſtow upon us crowns of bliſs and immortality; when our reſignations ſhall receive the applauſe of angels, and the approbation of our bleſſed Redeemer, who, while upon earth, was the moſt perfect pattern of this heavenly virtue, and in the ſevereſt trial that ever was, prayed, ſaying, "Not my will, O Father, but thine be done." This is what St. Peter had in view, when he adviſed us to "humble ourſelves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time."

Nor ſhall this yielding of ourſelves to God, this fixed and prevailing reſolution

of obedience ceaſe, even when we are exalted far above all earthly rule and authority and power: for a great part of our happineſs will then conſiſt in this, that we ſhall have no more ſelf-will, no more ſiniſter views or unſubdued deſires of our own, but one common will and end and intereſt with God, and we ſhall rejoice in his greatneſs "with joy unſpeakable and full of glory." Then ſhall we "fall down with the four-and-twenty elders before him that ſits on the throne, and worſhip him that liveth for ever and ever, and caſt our crowns before the throne, ſaying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour and glory and power; for thou haſt created all things, and for thy pleaſure they are and were created."

Are we then, by the favour of God, poſſeſſed of heaven-born ſouls and allied to angels? Let us remember, that at the ſame time our foundation is in the duſt, and not be puffed up with vain-glory, or ſtrain to ſwell ourſelves to the ſize of the infinite Spirit, and renounce our dependance upon him: which

which we do whenever we ſuffer any inordinate or rebellious thoughts to ferment in our boſoms. And on the other hand, let us not ſo far degrade ourſelves, as to ſuffer any earthly thing to lord it in our hearts. Let us conſecrate all our faculties to God's uſe and ſervice; let our feet run in the way of his commandments, and our eyes be directed towards heaven which is the ſeat of his glory; and ſince they fail us, let us call in the force of our ſouls to our aſſiſtance, and with the eye of faith behold him ſeated in ineffable majeſty on the throne of his power.

But God has not only a right to our obedience, as he is, abſtractedly conſidered, infinitely and eſſentially powerful in himſelf, but more particularly as he is our creator, preſerver, and benefactor. There is always a rightful power acquired by benefits, where there is none antecedently: thus if I have received ſignal favours from another, and ſuch as I cannot repay, I am bound by the laws of gratitude to ſubmit my will to his in every thing that is law-

ful, and to ſerve him in all his reaſonable commands, provided my ſervice is not already pre-engaged.

If therefore one man may challenge homage from another, as his benefactor, while in the mean time both of them are of the ſame rank of beings, and only removed a little way from each other by diverſity of ſtation or poſſeſſions; certainly we ought to be intirely paſſive to God, who, though he be higher than it is poſſible for us to conceive, yet ſtoops to take notice of, and pour the light of his countenance upon, the "ſon of man which is a worm."

Neither can our obligations to any being whatſoever be prior to thoſe we have from God, for to him we owe our very beings, and conſequently our capacity to enjoy any good at all. For it was he that formed this curious machine of our body in the womb, and "in his book were all our members written, when day by day they were faſhioned, when as yet there was none of them." It was he that breathed

into our noſtrils the breath of life, and beſtowed on us ſouls which are particles of his divine fire, of wonderful force and activity, fitted to underſtand and admire the grandeur, beauty, and order of the univerſe that ſurrounds us; and what is more, to perceive our own original, whereby we are made wiſer than the beaſts of the field, to be ſenſible of the immenſe greatneſs of his power and of our relation to him, to know his adorable goodneſs and his providential care, and accordingly to be chearfully ſubject to his wiſe government and fatherly correction.

Now though God has not gained any increaſe of power by creating us, but only has made new ſubjects whereon to exerciſe that dominion which was always inherent in him, yet doubtleſs by giving us our beings, he has laid new ties of duty upon us.

Again, God is alſo our preſerver, and was he to withdraw his ſupporting hand from under us, we ſhould either immediately ceaſe to be, or elſe be miſe-

rable. And ſhall we impiouſly rebel againſt his holy pleaſure, from whoſe bounty we derive the iſſues of life, and the freſh and ſprightly ſupplies of health and vigour? Behold, all the reſt of the creation conſtantly and carefully obey his commands; the angels, thoſe happy ſpirits, rejoice to be made the miniſters of his will; all the hoſts of heaven move in thoſe paths that he has appointed them; at his word the ſtormy winds are huſhed; and the proud waves of the ocean paſs not the bounds that he has ordained. And ſhall man be more fierce than the whirlwind, more ſwelling and intractable than the raging ſea? Shall the author of nature reap the fruit of his care and beneficence from all other creatures, and ſhall man, for whoſe ſake the greateſt part of them was made, refuſe to be at his devotion? God forbid!

In the xixth of Leviticus we find, that God having laid down a great number of precepts, ſubjoins almoſt to every one of them, as an obligation upon his people to obſerve and obey them, "I am the Lord,"

or elſe "I am the Lord your God." "I am the Lord," my power and authority is unbounded, and capable to give a ſanction to whatſoever laws my wiſdom ſhall appoint, and none can ſay unto me, "What doſt thou?" I expect therefore that you follow my dictates with the moſt profound humility, and bow down to me with the moſt reverential awe. "I am alſo your God," you have received very wonderful marks of my goodneſs and kind regard; ought you not therefore with all the eagerneſs of gratitude to perform thoſe commandments which I lay upon you for your own advantage? For if you be righteous, what do you give me, or what do I receive at your hand? "Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens is mine, the earth alſo and all that therein is. Circumciſe therefore the foreſkin of your heart, and be no more ſtiff-necked. For I the Lord your God am God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not perſons nor accepteth rewards, I am your praiſe, and I am your God

which have done for you theſe great and terrible things, which your eyes have ſeen."

"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and ſacrifices (ſaith the prophet Samuel) as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than ſacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the ſin of witchcraft, and ſtubbornneſs is as iniquity and idolatry." The meaning of which paſſage is, that the performance of all poſitive duties whatſoever is not ſo acceptable in the ſight of God, as ſubmiſſion to his will, which is a virtue of eternal and unchangeable obligation. Whereas thoſe that rebel againſt God, enter as it were into a confederacy with thoſe infernal powers, who were baniſhed from above. Rebellion is as iniquity too, becauſe it is contrary to the dictates of right reaſon, and an impious refuſal to pay God that ſervice, which is demonſtrated to be his due, as well on account of his infinite goodneſs, as of his infinite power. And as the idolater worſhips the creature inſtead of the Creator, ſo the ſtubborn

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man here mentioned erects a throne in his heart for the golden image of pride, and ſacrifices all his ſoul and all his ſtrength unto it. For our affections naturally enthrall themſelves to ſomething or other, and can by no means preſerve an equal indifference to all things; our will muſt chuſe ſome object of adoration, and therefore if it is not directed to an object worthy of it, it will of courſe take up with mean and abject purſuits. And did men perform that ſubmiſſion to the God of heaven, which they do to the tyranny of their own luſts, whoſe end is woe and bitterneſs, their ſalvation and their glory would be built upon a rock which never can be ſhaken.

Rebellion againſt God is ſtill more horrible, as it leads men by the hand into all other vices. 'Tis not probable that he who is ſo wicked as to withdraw his allegiance from his king, will give himſelf the trouble to obey any of his laws, any farther than they are agreeable to his own temper and inclinations. And is it to be ſuppoſed, that he who caſts off God's authority, to gra-

gratify his pride, will ſcruple to do the ſame in order to ſatisfy his covetouſneſs, his intemperance, or his cruelty? Certainly therefore it is of the laſt importance to ſubmit ourſelves to God, not only that we may attain to a great degree of perfection and happineſs, but alſo that we may not ſink into the greateſt depravity and miſery.

God's ſervice is perfect freedom: and it is no leſs perfect, becauſe our ſubmiſſion is indiſpenſably neceſſary; ſince our reaſon, when it is no longer overſhadowed with the vapours of ſelf-will, voluntarily chuſes and embraces it. Otherwiſe, God himſelf could not properly be ſaid to be free, for his wiſdom gives law to his power, and actuates and determines all his ſubſequent motions. If therefore God be free, notwithſtanding that he is obliged to act conſiſtently with himſelf; if it be no freedom to have a licence to break through the bars of truth and equity; if true liberty be not the occaſion of reſtleſſneſs and confuſion, but of peace and order; doubtleſs,

leſs, ſubmiſſion to the will of God is a ſtate of the moſt conſummate liberty that can be imagined.

Did God make uſe of his power to reduce us to helpleſs and deſperate wretchedneſs; did he by an unavoidable fatality cauſe us to fix upon ſin and evil; then indeed we might complain in the anguiſh of our ſouls of the inſupportable ſlavery and barbarous oppreſſion. But on the contrary, when we had brought ourſelves into bondage to the world and the devil (thoſe hard maſters that not only exact the moſt laborious ſervice, but alſo the more obſequious their votaries are to them, puniſh them the more); when, I ſay, ignorance and iniquity reigned in the world, then God of his great mercy ſent his only Son to publiſh the holy goſpel, which is the perfect law of liberty, to be a "light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our paths." It has been, and ſtill is cuſtomary among mankind to put thoſe ſlaves, whom they buy with money, to the moſt grievous drudgery, though they have no other

other right over them: but though God, over and above his perpetual authority over us, has likewiſe purchaſed us with an "ineſtimable price," even the price of the ſacred "blood of his own Son," he was far from applying the additional title he was veſted with, to make us exhibit any mean and unworthy inſtances of vaſſalage; no, he bought us, only that he might bring us nearer to himſelf, and give us the glorious privilege to become his ſons and fellow-heirs with Chriſt.

As to the extent of our ſubmiſſion, it muſt be univerſal. Since we are ſatisfied that God knows whatever will contribute to the advancement of our reaſonable nature, as he is our all-wiſe creator; ſince he will lay upon us no commands but ſuch as tend to our welfare, nor preſcribe us any taſk that he will not aſſiſt us to go through with, as he is our kind maſter and gracious preſerver; ſurely we would not refuſe ſo infallible a director, who can neither be miſtaken in our true end, nor in the means proper to attain it, and chuſe to ſteer our courſe

courſe by the frail and erring compaſs of our own underſtanding, which of itſelf can neither ſhew us the right haven where our voyage ſhould end, nor ſafely conduct us in the road unto it. If therefore our own judgments fail us, we ought joyfully and thankfully to receive and follow a light from heaven, a divine revelation of the means and methods of our ſalvation. And ſeeing we are convinced that the holy ſcriptures are the laws and rules of God, who neither can be deceived nor deceive us, we ought with all lowlineſs and meekneſs to believe the myſteries contained in them, though they may exceed our ſhallow depth of reaſon to comprehend. Again, ſince all things in the world belong to God by an unalienable tenure, ourſelves not excepted, and he muſt have a right to diſpoſe of his own as he pleaſes, we ought readily to acquieſce in and be content with thoſe ſtations wherein he has placed us, and not to overlook and ſet at nought the bleſſings we have, out of a vain and fooliſh deſire of thoſe which we have not. Such idle aſpiring thoughts will quickly vaniſh

vaniſh, if at the ſame time we conſider that the parts we have to act are given us by infinite wiſdom, which certainly knows what we are moſt fit for; and that if we perform thoſe parts to the ſatisfaction of our Lord, we ſhall, when this tranſient part of our exiſtence is over, have as good a title to our reſpective rewards, as the kings and princes of the earth will have to theirs. We are alſo obliged to ſubmit to the troubles and afflictions God thinks fit to lay upon us with great reſignation and humility. We ought to reflect, that though the ſupreme law-giver may juſtly puniſh us for every fault, and ſuffer the fury of his whole diſpleaſure to ariſe, yet he mercifully ſpares us; and when he is obliged to take the rod for our correction, he does it with all the tenderneſs and reluctance of a gracious father. Ought we not therefore to bleſs the arm that viſits us, and without murmuring undergo that diſcipline which is intended to make us better and happier, and to work in us among others this divine virtue of ſubmiſſion and holy reſignation?

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A plenary ſubmiſſion to the divine will delivers us from all the anxiety of doubt, and the troubleſome ſuſpenſe of an undetermined choice. Now the human ſoul has ſo vehement a deſire of happineſs, that it cannot poſſibly enjoy any peace or eaſe, unleſs it be perſuaded that it is walking in the right road towards the acquiſition of it. While therefore it ſeeks it in ſublunary things or in the creature, as it muſt always be diſappointed of its hope, it will ſtill be making new trials, ſtill uncertain of an event in which it is ſo much concerned, and at laſt intirely deſpairing of ſucceſs; than which 'tis hard to conceive a more wretched condition. But when we are directed by infinite wiſdom, we are ſatisfied every ſtep we take we are ſo much nearer our chief good, and therefore have no doubts or alarms of danger to diſturb us; but keeping our eye ſteadily fixed on our certain though unſeen reward, we proceed in our journey full of inexpreſſible joy and complacency.

To conclude, Let us not only pray every day that Chriſt's kingdom may come, that he

he may rule in the hearts of all men, but let us actually acknowledge his dominion by chearfully taking upon us his yoke. Let us poſſeſs our minds with the ſublimeſt notions of God's unbounded power and wiſdom and purity, and with ſuch a feeling ſenſe of our own weakneſs and ignorance and iniquity, that we may in all things meekly ſubmit unto him, and fall low on our knees before his footſtool.

SERMON X.

On the Worſhip of God.

JOHN iv. 24.

God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.

THE woman of Samaria having heard our bleſſed Saviour reveal all the ſecrets of her life, which ſhe thought no one privy to but God, immediately concluded

cluded he was a prophet. She therefore changed the diſcourſe to that important queſtion, which was the cauſe of the hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans; viz. which was the right place of worſhip, Mount Gerizzim or Jeruſalem? The Samaritans received only the five books of Moſes, and finding in Deuteronomy (xii. 5.) that God would have but one place for burnt-offerings and ſacrifice, they contended that Mount Gerizzim was the place; and a temple was built there by Sanballat the Horonite, in favour of his ſon-in-law Manaſſeh, and in oppoſition to Ezra, who commanded all the prieſts to put away their heathen wives. On the other hand, the Jews who received the prophets and all the writings of the old Teſtament, plainly ſhewed out of them, that Jeruſalem was the place in which God had choſen to record his name.

The woman being thoroughly convinced that Jeſus was a prophet, aſked his opinion in this matter. To whom our Saviour replied, "Woman, believe me, the

hour cometh, when ye ſhall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jeruſalem, worſhip the Father." That is, there will be no reaſon to trouble yourſelves about this diſpute any longer, inaſmuch as the occaſion of it will be removed in a little time: for the ſacrifices which are offered both at Jeruſalem and Mount Gerizzim ſhall ere long ceaſe for ever, and ſo the privileges which you ſo earneſtly contend for, ſhall be taken from you both. That worſhip which conſiſts in ſacrifice, burnt offerings and the like, ſhall be aboliſhed, and a more ſpiritual one ſhall be ſubſtituted in its place, and thoſe only ſhall be accounted the true worſhippers, who, in what place ſoever they are, give their hearts and ſouls intirely to God, who devote their whole lives to his ſervice, who ſincerely love and obey him in all things, and "worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth."

In diſcourſing upon which words, I ſhall in the firſt place, endeavour to ſhew what is here meant by worſhipping God in ſpirit and in truth. Secondly, I ſhall inſtance

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in ſome of the principal kinds of ſpiritual worſhip. And Thirdly, I ſhall conſider what times and places are moſt proper for the performance of this worſhip, together with ſome other circumſtances and appendages of it.

Before I proceed to ſhew what is meant by worſhipping God in ſpirit and in truth, it will be proper to premiſe a few words concerning the being, and the ſpiritual nature of God.

Now that there is a God, is the foundation of all religion; and under every climate this belief has prevailed, and been ſtampt in indelible characters upon the ſouls of all men; nor, as the Roman orator obſerves, has the greateſt barbariſm and ignorance been able to eraſe thoſe ſecret notices men have always had of a ſupreme and intelligent Being. All nature loudly proclaims him, and the ſtill voice of reaſon whiſpers him to us.

And that he is a ſpirit is proved by conſidering that the ſpirituality of the divine nature is a real perfection. "For the firſt and moſt natural notion that we have of God is, that he is a being every way perfect; and from this notion we muſt argue concerning the properties which are attributed to God, and govern all our reaſonings concerning God by this. If any man aſk, why I ſay, God is a ſpirit, or good, or juſt? The beſt reaſon that can be given is, becauſe theſe are perfections, and the contrary to theſe are imperfections. Now to imagine God to be a body or matter, evidently contradicts ſeveral great perfections of God; viz. his omnipreſence or the immenſity of his being; his knowledge and wiſdom; his freedom and liberty; and his goodneſs too. For matter exiſts in parts, every one of which by the term is imperfect. It is changeable, incapable of acting, paſſive only, and ſtupid."

God is a ſpirit, and therefore to be worſhipped in ſpirit. "The force of the conſequence does not lie in this, that juſt ſuch

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as God is, ſuch muſt our worſhip of him be, for this would exclude all bodily and outward worſhip; our worſhip of God muſt therefore be inviſible and infinite, for ſo is he; and beſides, the will of God ſeems rather to be the rule of his worſhip than his nature: but the force of it is this, God is of a ſpiritual nature, and this is to be ſuppoſed to be his will, that our worſhip ſhould be as agreeable to the object of it, as the nature of the creature who is to give it will bear. Now the ſervice of our mind and ſpirit is the beſt we can perform, and therefore moſt agreeable to God, who is a ſpirit, and the beſt and moſt perfect Being."

"Not that the external ſervice of God is here excluded, not that we are to ſhew no outward reverence to him: but that as under the law, the ſervice of God was chiefly external and corporeal, ſo now it ſhould chiefly be inward and ſpiritual."

As there always has been an univerſal belief of a Deity, ſo it has been no leſs univerſally acknowledged that this Deity ought

to be worſhipped. But many have been the miſtaken notions concerning this point; for how to addreſs themſelves to him, or what form or manner of worſhip he would be pleaſed with, the ableſt maſters of reaſon were utterly at a loſs to know. It was from their ignorance in this matter, that all the abominable idolatries and ſenſeleſs ſuperſtition of the pagan religion firſt aroſe. Hence were derived all thoſe abſurd and groſs opinions, which like a deluge, overflowed the whole earth, and which to enumerate would be as needleſs as it is impoſſible.

Yet amidſt this almoſt general darkneſs, there was ſtill one part of the earth illuminated; for "in Sion was God known, and his name was great in Iſrael;" it was there that God was pleaſed to diſplay his glory, and to preſcribe after what manner he would be worſhipped; but their religion conſiſted moſtly in typical ſacrifices and repreſentations of thoſe ineſtimable bleſſings, which were reſerved for the laſt diſpenſation of his will, the times of the Meſſiah. But then they were to be quite

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abrogated and aboliſhed, and the worſhip was no longer to conſiſt in carnal rites and ordinances, but in ſpirit and in truth. And the reaſon was, becauſe the ſervice of the ſoul and ſpirit, which is the beſt we can pay, muſt be due to the ſpiritual nature of the ſupreme Being.

By worſhipping God in ſpirit and in truth, is meant the performance of all thoſe duties of piety and devotion, which we owe him, with ſuch ſincerity and integrity, ſuch zeal and fervency, as to exclude all indifference, lukewarmneſs, and hypocriſy; for it is the ſervice of the ſoul, and the devout and honeſt intention of the heart, which the Almighty chiefly regards; "My ſon (ſays the inſpired writer) give me thy heart." God reſpects not ſo much the form and ceremony of the external performance, as the inward diſpoſition, and the ſpirit from whence it proceeds. All ſacrifice, all worſhip, and every religious act, without this, is an abomination to the Lord. It was the great complaint of God himſelf, againſt the Jews, that they played

the hypocrite with him, that "they honoured him only with their mouth, but their heart was far from him." Nay, ſo diſpleaſing to him was their cold and inſipid devotion, that he therefore loathed and abhorred his own ordinances in their performance of them, as we find in Iſaiah; "Bring no more vain oblations; incenſe is an abomination unto me, the new moons and ſabbaths, the calling of aſſemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the ſolemn meeting. And when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you, and when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood." And then he proceeds to tell them what was to be done in order to make their worſhip acceptable; "Waſh you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well, ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow." Which things, would they take care duly to perform, then he would not only accept their ſacrifices and oblations, but likewiſe pardon

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all their ſins, their moſt flagrant iniquities. "Though your ſins be as ſcarlet, yet they ſhall be white as ſnow, though they be red as crimſon, they ſhall be as wool."

From hence we may obſerve, that the Almighty does not delight in the moſt exact, or pompous performance of religious duties, except it be attended with an heart inflamed with zeal for God's honour and glory; and notwithſtanding the religion which God appointed the Jews, in a great meaſure conſiſted in rites and ceremonies, yet he gave them ſufficiently to underſtand, that a ſpiritual worſhip, or a worſhip of the ſoul, was the thing which he principally delighted in. "Thou deſireſt not ſacrifice, (ſaith the Pſalmiſt) elſe would I give it thee, but thou delighteſt not in burnt-offerings; the ſacrifices of God are a broken ſpirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not deſpiſe."

So that to worſhip God in ſpirit, is to worſhip him with the utmoſt integrity of both

both heart and ſoul; to be truly ſincere and fervent in every ſolemn act of devotion, whether public or private; to draw near to the courts of his houſe with due reverence and awe, and ſenſible of our own unworthineſs, and the manifold tranſgreſſions which we have committed, there humbly to implore pardon for our offences paſt, and renew our promiſes of obedience for the future; to return our unfeigned thanks for every mercy we have already received, and to beſeech his care and protection of us to the end of our lives. And all this we are to perform in ſuch an humble frame and diſpoſition, both of mind and body, as the conſideration of our being under his more immediate preſence ought to create in us. This is to worſhip God in ſpirit. That we may worſhip him in truth, we muſt take care to avoid all diſſimulation and hypocriſy in our worſhip; we muſt not ſay in our hearts, "How ſhall God ſee it? Is there knowledge in the moſt High?" but on the contrary, ſeriouſly conſider that God is preſent every where, ſees and knows our

moſt ſecret actions, and the moſt ſilent intentions of our hearts; the ſtill motion of thought cannot eſcape him, nor can the clouds of darkneſs hide us from his all-ſeeing eye. For, "he that planted the ear, ſhall he not hear? he that formed the eye, ſhall he not ſee?" There is then no concealing ourſelves from the ſearch of infinite knowledge, nor hiding ourſelves from the diſcoveries of Omniſcience. Whenever we offer up our petitions to Almighty God, and beg any bleſſings at his hand, we muſt take care to do it with an holy hope, and a full reliance upon his mercy and goodneſs. When we implore pardon for our ſins, we muſt do it with an unfeigned humiliation and deep ſenſe of our own unworthineſs. When we offer him up our thanks and praiſes, we muſt remember, not only to make melody with our mouths, but likewiſe in our hearts. To worſhip God after this manner, is to worſhip him in ſincerity and truth, and in a way which is moſt ſuitable to his ſpiritual nature.

Perhaps

Perhaps it may be aſked, what reaſon is there that the true worſhippers of God ſhould now worſhip him in a more ſpiritual manner, than the Jews did formerly, for God was a ſpirit then as well as now? To this I reply, that God did always require to be worſhipped in ſpirit; for, even to the Jews it was ſaid, "Circumciſe the foreſkin of your hearts, and be no more ſtiff-necked;" and again, "I deſired mercy and not ſacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings." But becauſe God hath more clearly revealed himſelf now to be a ſpirit, than under the law, he therefore now more ſtrictly requires ſpiritual worſhip from his people. For under the law, he frequently revealed himſelf by ſenſible appearances, viſions and voices, as condeſcending therein to the tender age and infirmity of his church. But now, ſince he has made the laſt revelation of his will, ſince he has brought life and immortality to light by the goſpel of his Son, he hath left off to reveal himſelf in that corporeal and ſenſible manner which he did to the Jews; and

and as he is a ſpirit, in a ſpiritual manner only, doth he communicate himſelf to his church under the goſpel. Therefore, it is ſpoken of as a bleſſing peculiar to the days of the goſpel, "that upon all fleſh God would pour out his ſpirit in a more plentiful manner, than ever he had done before."

As God is a being infinite in power, knowledge, juſtice, mercy and goodneſs, each of theſe attributes ought to command our higheſt admiration and eſteem, our profoundeſt adoration and reverence, ſince they are excellencies of the divine nature, whereby he infinitely tranſcends all other beings. Hence we find, where the Pſalmiſt makes mention of the majeſty of God, "The Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods," he ſubjoins, "O come, let us worſhip and fall down and kneel before the Lord our Maker."

Now, though there may be ſeveral ways of worſhipping God in ſpirit and in truth, yet the two principal ones are prayer and thankſ-

thankſgiving, both of which are very frequently and earneſtly inculcated in holy ſcripture. As to the firſt of theſe, prayer, it may be ſaid to be an application of the mind unto God, and a petitioning of him for every thing that is needful, both for our ſouls and bodies. One would think there was no occaſion for arguments to invite us to this duty, ſince the end of it is to advance our own intereſt and happineſs, and it is nothing elſe but obtaining a favour upon the eaſy terms of requeſting it, if God in his infinite wiſdom ſees it to be for our good. By the devout performance of this duty we have an intercourſe with God, and God with us; our ſouls aſcend to heaven in holy raptures, while our bodies are upon earth, and God deſcends to us in vouchſafing to hear us, though at the ſame time his majeſtic preſence is in the heaven of heavens. This duty of prayer may be conſidered under the ſeveral heads of the devotions of the cloſet, family, and public prayer.

Private

Private prayer; when we ſequeſter ourſelves from the eye of the world, retire into our cloſets, and there ſearch our own hearts, become deeply ſenſible of our own infirmities and imperfections, and offer up our petitions with hearts full of zeal, and hope, and affection. Here are no objects to divert our thoughts, no hurry to interrupt our petitions.

But ſtill we muſt take care to order our private and family devotions, ſo as not to interfere with the public worſhip. This is of equal neceſſity and obligation with the former, for God requires of us a ſolemn and public adoration. And we are not only warranted to this by Chriſt and his apoſtles, but are alſo encouraged by a ſpecial promiſe of having our prayers heard; for "where two or three are gathered together in our Lord's name, there he is ſaid to be in the midſt of them." Beſides, it is to be preſumed, that there are ſome particular illuminations which cannot be obtained without public prayer. Thus the Pſalmiſt, when he ſaw the ungodly in great proſperity,

perity, and flouriſhing like a green Bay-tree, was ſtaggered at it, till he went into the ſanctuary of the Lord; "then, ſays he, underſtood I the end of theſe men." And, if we did but diligently endeavour to obſerve ſuch a method, as the royal Pſalmiſt did, whoſe conſtant cuſtom was to pray to, and praiſe the Lord in the congregation, as well as in private, we ſhould, like him, become "athirſt for God, even for the living God," and deſpiſe all things in compariſon of him, who is the ſource and fountain of all ſubſtantial pleaſure; and the author of every bleſſing. Are we in want; who can better relieve us than he who is infinitely good and powerful? Are we involved in troubles and difficulties; who can better direct us than all-knowing wiſdom? Are we under trials and temptations; who is more able to deliver us than infinite power and mercy, which will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able? And whatever real bleſſings we aſk, we are ſure to obtain, if we do but aſk aright, through the merits and mediation

of Chriſt Jeſus, our Interceſſor and Redeemer.

Another principal kind of ſpiritual worſhip is thankſgiving. This duty conſiſts in praiſing and adoring the Almighty for all the bleſſings, both ſpiritual and temporal, which he hath beſtowed either upon ourſelves, or thoſe in whom we are concerned, upon the church and nation whereof we are members, or upon all mankind in general. And this duty is no leſs incumbent upon us than that of prayer, and is equally enjoined in holy ſcripture. We find the royal Pſalmiſt frequently exciting himſelf to the practice of this duty: "Awake up my glory, awake lute and harp, I myſelf will awake right early. I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the people, I will ſing unto thee among the nations." But more eſpecially after any great deliverance or ſignal mercy ſhewn him, he breaks out into the moſt exalted rapture and ecſtaſy: "I will ſing of the mercies of the Lord for ever." Which may ſerve as a reproach to many

of us, who when calamities and afflictions are upon us, when ſickneſs or pain hath ſeized us, offer not only our own petitions to God, but call in others to our aſſiſtance, and oftentimes deſire the prayers of a whole congregation: but when God has been pleaſed to hear our requeſt, like the ungrateful lepers in the goſpel, there is ſcarce one in ten, that ſhews his gratitude to God for his recovery, by leading a better life. How different from this is the practice of holy David, who not only took care of his conduct after his repentance, but thought it a performance too mean, and not ſuitable to the dignity of almighty God, for none but himſelf to ſing his marvellous loving-kindneſs, and therefore he intreats others to bear a part with him: "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us praiſe his name together."

It would be impoſſible for me to inſtance in all the mercies which every man receives from God, becauſe they differ both in kind and degree, between one man and another: but he that receives the feweſt is

more

more indebted to God than a whole life of thanks can repay. I ſhall therefore only point out to you in general what things we are obliged to thank God for. Theſe principally are the things which relate to our ſpiritual intereſt and grand concern in another world. For the ſame order is to be kept in our prayers and in our praiſes; and as we are chiefly to pray for ſpiritual bleſſings, ſo it is for them more eſpecially we are to give thanks; for our creation, preſervation, and all the temporal bleſſings we enjoy.

I proceed now to ſpeak concerning the propriety of time and place, for the performing of this ſpiritual worſhip, together with ſome other circumſtances and appendages of it.

"We muſt worſhip God, and therefore it is naturally neceſſary that we ſhould do it ſomewhere, in ſome place: now ſeeing ſomebody muſt determine this, it is moſt convenient that authority ſhould determine it according to the

conveniency of a neighbourhood. We muſt not do any thing that is naturally indecent in the worſhip of God; this, authority ſhould reſtrain; but farther than this, I doubt not but the goſpel has left us free; and to this end, that the leſs we are tied to external obſervances, the more intent we ſhould be upon the ſpiritual and ſubſtantial parts of religion, the conforming ourſelves to the mind and will of God, endeavouring to be like unto God, and to have our ſouls and ſpirits engaged in thoſe duties we perform to him."

"And wherever the external part of religion is principally regarded, and men are more careful to worſhip God with outward pomp and ceremony, than in ſpirit and in truth, religion degenerates into ſuperſtition, and men embrace the ſhadow, and let go the ſubſtance."

We read that when God had finiſhed the works of creation, which was at the end of ſix days, he made the ſeventh a reſting-day for himſelf. A day it was of jubilee in hea-

ven, when the glorious choirs of cherubim and ſeraphim ſung in triumph, when the whole hoſt of heaven tuned their everlaſting harps, and all the ſons of God ſhouted for joy. And in commemoration of his ceaſing from his works that day, he inſtituted it a day of reſt for ever, calling it his ſabbath, and commanding it to be reverenced and kept holy throughout all generations.

There are ſome other reaſons why the ſeventh day ſhould be ſanctified; but as the compaſs of this diſcourſe will not permit me to take notice of them, I ſhall only obſerve at preſent, how neceſſary and conducive it is to the peace and welfare of human ſociety, to aſſemble one day in ſeven, mutually to recognize the great author of our being, to offer up our joint prayers and petitions, and to ſhew forth the loving kindneſs of the Lord in the courts of his houſe. Were we entirely left to ourſelves, and at liberty only to call upon God when we pleaſe, in this public and ſolemn manner, I am afraid that would be very ſeldom,

and we ſhould ſoon forget our Maker. But as long as we make theſe frequent returns to his houſe, we keep the fear of God freſh upon our minds; and I need not tell you that the fear of God is the only effectual reſtraint from evil. This confines the inclinations of men within due bounds, keeps their paſſions under proper ſubjection, and curbs every ill deſire. Whereas, ſhould men ever loſe that awful ſenſe they have of a God, ſhould they ever "break the bands of religion, and caſt away its cords from them," which, alas! would too ſoon be the caſe, if we had no public and ſtated times for the performance of religious offices, every man would follow his own inventions, good or bad, and the greateſt part would ſoon be loſt to a ſenſe of duty: this would create miſerable confuſion and diſorder, and introduce in the room of love and peace and harmony, barbarity and diſcord. For as ſoon as men ſhould forget their obedience to God, they would preſently forget their duty to man, and we ſhould be either deſtroying or deſtroyed one of another. But thanks be to God,

God, we have public times and ſeaſons appointed for his ſervice, ſolemn days ſet apart for religious exerciſes, and one in ſeven peculiarly appropriated to divine worſhip.

Let us therefore frequently viſit the temple of the Lord, and worſhip there in the beauty of holineſs. Let us feel a ſecret pleaſure and complacency upon the ſight of a congregation, that are all met upon one common intereſt, and who come all to partake of the ſame ſpiritual advantages. Let us all conſider that we are invited by God himſelf, that he himſelf is in the midſt of us, and that he makes no diſtinction of perſons, but that the ſame heavenly nutriment is diſtributed to all alike. In a word, let us ſet God always before us, converſe with him in our cloſets, and worſhip him in our families. Thus we ſhall prepare ourſelves for a ſtate of perfection, and whenever it ſhall pleaſe God to call us, be received as welcome gueſts in the manſions of eternity.

SERMON XII.

On the Divine Goodneſs,

PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

THE divine goodneſs is written in ſuch plain characters in the works of creation and providence, and is ſo frequently inculcated in holy ſcripture, that it ſeems to be obvious to the moſt common apprehenſion. It is eaſier to believe that there is no God at all, than that he is not a good and gracious Being. But yet this amiable attribute ſeems to be often miſtaken, and generally not well conſidered; and therefore becomes neceſſary to be explained and enlarged upon. It muſt proceed in great meaſure from the inattention of men to this perfection in the Deity, that they love him

him ſo little, and are ſo unthankful to him; that they are ſo diſſatisfied with their condition, ſo anxious about future events, and truſt ſo little to his care. Did they firmly believe that he commands nothing but what is for their benefit, and that obedience to his will is the readieſt way to happineſs, God would certainly have more faithful and affectionate ſervants than at preſent he has. The will of God is moſt undoubtedly agreeable to his nature and his acts, and therefore if he be kind and bountiful himſelf, he muſt expect that we ſhould imitate him in kindneſs and mercy: whence is it then but from the want of due reflection on this, that there is ſo much cruelty and malignity in the world. But the worſt miſtake of all concerning this divine attribute is, when men imagine, that God is ſo much diſpoſed to mercy, that he will forgive the moſt hardened rebellion, and forbear to puniſh the wicked and impenitent. The true notion of it, in ſhort is this, that it is a diſpoſition in God to communicate happineſs to ſuch of his creatures, as are capable of receiving, and fit objects of it.

The

The Firſt Cauſe of all things, being originally and eſſentially happy in the enjoyment of his own perfections, could not propoſe to himſelf any other end in making any creatures at all, but to impart good and happineſs to them, and to beſtow his bleſſings on them, according to the capacities with which they ſhould be endowed, and the reſpective claſs in which they ſhould be placed. Perfectly independent and all-ſufficient, he muſt be removed at the fartheſt diſtance from malice and envy, and all other cauſes of inflicting needleſs miſery and producing evil. Cruelty is the effect of weakneſs and fear, of jealouſy and ill-will; but theſe things are incompatible with the notion of a ſupreme and all-powerful being.

Accordingly we find plain and evident marks of the divine goodneſs in the works that he hath made. Large as the compaſs of creation is, every thing contributes to the beauty, the order and well-being of the whole. Moſt prodigious is the number of living creatures, that riſe in a beautiful ſcale of proportions above each other; and

yet

yet each ſpecies of theſe has its proper region and peculiar food and pleaſure. The air is ſweet and pleaſant, and a fit medium for animals of the moſt different ſorts to breathe in. The water nouriſhes the earth, and ſupplies it with that radical moiſture which is the ſource of vegetation. And the earth by the kindly influence of the ſun is made very plenteous; it is clothed with a vaſt variety of foods, is ſweetened with the fragrancy of odours, and produces fruit of the moſt exquiſite taſte and reliſh. Some animals are indeed ſhort-lived; but then they are not troubled with the remembrance of any paſt hardſhip, and they enjoy the good of the preſent moment without any fear of future pain and misfortune, or the gloomy apprehenſions of death. Moſt of theſe inferior creatures miniſter to the neceſſity or delight, the ſubſiſtence or comfort of man. To know whether the earth be ſufficiently ſtored for the ſatisfaction of man conſidered as a creature of this world, we need go no farther than this, that many are ſo much enamoured of it, they are willing to ſet up their

taber-

tabernacle here, and deſire not to ſeek any better country. Moſt men are provided with a competent ſhare of the good things of this life; and the reaſon why all are not ſo, is not becauſe God has not made a ſufficient proviſion for all, but becauſe ſome out of luxury and pride laviſh more upon themſelves than need requires, and others through idleneſs and ſloth neglect to lay up againſt a day of neceſſity. Nay, life itſelf, is reckoned ſo valuable a poſſeſſion, that the pooreſt labourer would chuſe to ſubmit to all his drudgery, rather than ceaſe to live. "Truly life and health is ſweet to him, and a pleaſant thing it is to ſee the ſun." Much the greater part of men are healthy and ſtrong, chearful and eaſy, in peace and quiet: and thoſe that labour under ſickneſs and pain, ſuffer them either from their ſtate of imperfection, the natural lot of mortality, or for the improvement of their virtues, or elſe as a puniſhment of their ſins.

Man is an intelligent and active creature, endowed with freedom of will; and this liberty

liberty he is capable of abuſing to the practice of vice. Therefore to preſerve him from utter corruption, and to puniſh him when ſo depraved, God has wiſely ordained that natural evil ſhall be the conſequence of moral evil. Beſides, the matter of which our bodies is compoſed is neceſſarily liable to change and decay, and therefore to pain and death: and every creature, as ſuch, is naturally imperfect: even the angels themſelves would be liable to ſin and miſery, and would have their defects, were they not preſerved in a ſtate of indefectible holineſs by the influences of the divine preſence. To aſk therefore why God produced any creatures whoſe enjoyments might be chequered with trouble and ſorrow, is to aſk why he produced any intelligent beings at all. But theſe are far the moſt excellent part of his works; and his goodneſs is ſufficiently vindicated by his putting it in their power, finally and upon the whole, to be happy: ſome previous pain is generally requiſite to increaſe the pleaſures of ſenſe, to put men upon their own preſervation, and upon improving and adorn-

adorning life. If dangerous diſtempers were unaccompanied with pain, men would periſh without ever ſeeking for a remedy; and if there were no ſuch thing as poverty, arts and ſciences would lie neglected, and none would labour in the education of youth. Want is the great inducement to the ſeeking out uſeful inventions, and to improving them when found. Univerſal idleneſs would be the conſequence of univerſal affluence, and the world would ſoon become rude and barbarous, diſſolute and prophane.

But it has been ſtill farther objected, that if God be ſo good and benevolent a being as we repreſent him, how comes it to paſs that there are ſo many poiſonous herbs and noxious animals, ſo many earthquakes and burning mountains, hurricanes, famines and peſtilences? To this we anſwer, that though we could not reconcile theſe things to the notion of a good creator, it does not follow that they are not to be accounted for, becauſe we are ſhort-ſighted beings, and our knowledge moſtly ſtops in the ſurface of

things. It may be obſerved, however, that the uſes of many things are now found out which were not known formerly, and the uſes of the reſt may be diſcovered, by thoſe that make curious reſearches into the works of God, in ſome future period of time. Many poiſonous herbs are uſeful in phyſic, and the beſt remedies are often prepared from them. Noxious animals are alſo ſerviceable the ſame way; and by ſucking the poiſonous juices out of the earth for their ſuſtenance, perhaps they make the reſt of it more wholeſome. Theſe creatures have their proper pleaſure and perfection as well as others. But the number of them is ſmall in compariſon of ſuch as are beneficial to mankind; and they may be intended to raiſe in us greater gratitude for the many creatures that are uſeful to us. As to burning mountains, it has been judiciouſly obſerved by a learned divine, that "though thoſe countries where there are vulcano's are uſually more or leſs troubled with earthquakes, yet were theſe vulcano's wanting, they would be much more annoyed with them than now they are."

And

And if the raging ſulphureous matter that cauſes earthquakes did not find vent by breaking the ſurface of the earth, it would probably ruin the compages of the whole fabric. Hurricanes and thunder clear the air, and prevent many contagious and fatal diſeaſes. Famines and peſtilences are indeed very terrible viſitations of God's hand. Theſe are puniſhments ſent by the juſt governor of the world upon a wicked and untoward generation, to awaken them from their lethargy of ſin, and to make them conſider his almighty power, and inflexible juſtice. Nations ſubſiſt in collective bodies of ſocieties only in this world, and therefore muſt be puniſhed for their public and national ſins here, or not at all. The greateſt difficulty is, that in theſe common calamities good men ſuffer along with the wicked without diſtinction. But it may be conſidered, that a nation is more ſorely puniſhed in being deprived of its good and uſeful members, than in loſing only thoſe that are evil and vicious: that good men are as liable to ſuffer by outward impreſſions as others, and could not be reſcued from them with-

without a miracle: and that in this caſe a miracle is not neceſſary, becauſe though they ſhould be afflicted here, yet God is able to make them abundant amends by a future reward.

Beſides, thoſe pleaſures that mankind enjoy in common with the creatures beneath them, there are alſo others of a more ſublime and excellent nature which they have in common with angels: The exerciſe of reaſon in the ſearch of truth, which improves our knowledge and enlarges our capacities of happineſs; which enables us to know the Firſt Great Cauſe, and to diſtinguiſh between good and evil; to underſtand our chief good, the divine favour, and to embrace and fit ourſelves for it; to diſcover a proper rule of action, and to act according to it. Man has alſo the great delight of chearful converſation and virtuous friendſhip, which enlivens his heart and diſburthens him of his cares; poliſhes his manners, and ſoftens his fiercer paſſions; calls forth the latent ſeeds of knowledge and virtue, and makes him ſtudy whatever is

lovely and praiſe-worthy. "As iron ſharpneth iron, ſo doth a man the face of his friend;" man has the tranſcendent and godlike pleaſure of doing good. In compariſon of this, the gratifications of ſenſe, nay the entertainments of the underſtanding itſelf, are mean and inſignificant. How admirably is the goodneſs of God diſplayed in conſtituting human nature ſo, that beneficence to our neighbours, which is a great part of his duty, yields us the greateſt and moſt ſubſtantial joy. The conſciouſneſs of having deſerved well of the community is a ſatisfaction near at hand; a man needs but look into his own breaſt, and there he finds it. It always appears with freſh beauty, upon every new ſurvey. Senſual indulgences give a man no pleaſure in the remembrance, often much pain; but the reflection on having done good and acted righteouſly, is agreeable for ever.

After all, it muſt be confeſſed that the lot of man is mixed with much trouble, that he has many pains to ſuffer, many difficulties to ſtruggle through, and great temptations

tations to reſiſt. The vegetable tribe arrive at the higheſt perfection of their natures, and animals enjoy the greateſt pleaſures they are capable of; but man is originally ſo formed, that without being perfectly virtuous, he cannot be perfectly happy. It remains therefore, that ſince God does all things in order and meaſure, the nobleſt creature in this lower world, needs not finally fall ſhort of a felicity full and adequate to his faculties; and that there is another ſtate wherein thoſe who have behaved themſelves as they ought here, ſhall attain their full conſummation of bliſs both in body and ſoul. Were it offered in choice to any rational ſpirit that knew the various ſcenes of this world, whether he would immediately ceaſe to be, or be embodied and take his chance for a mortal life, and at the end of that to be no more; I ſuppoſe he would chuſe immediate annihilation. But bleſſed be the juſtice and goodneſs of God, that is not the caſe. He has appointed us a duration not only longer than that of trees and animals, but commenſurate to eternity. When the glorious light of the ſun ſhall

be put out, when the moon ſhall perform her courſe no more, and all the mighty works of the material world ſhall periſh, man (the immortal ſpirit I mean) ſhall ſtill live. Nay, when he ſhall have ſubſiſted more ages than the world ſhall laſt, he ſhall be ſtill as it were but beginning to live; for he ſhall ſtill have an eternity before him, which is not leſſened by the conſumption of years. And we have it in our power to attain a happineſs as great as it is laſting. God hath provided for them that love him a final place of reſt. He will take them near to himſelf, admit them to ſee his glorious preſence, and to enjoy the emanations of his infinite perfection. There they will have the ſublimeſt employment for their underſtanding, on which they may contemplate without being weary. Nor ſhall they proceed with that ſlow proceſs of reaſoning we do now, but ſhall know the truth without weary ſteps, and almoſt by intuition. Thoſe that could not ſatisfy their longings after knowledge here, ſhall then freely drink out of the rivers of inexhauſtible wiſdom. They will alſo have the beſt

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and moſt perfect objects whereon to exerciſe their affections. The love and friendſhip of a good man is delightful even here; how ecſtatic then muſt be the converſation of juſt men made perfect, how rapturous the love of the ſaints in light, where they have ſo many perfections to eſteem in each other, without any mixture or allay of evil or error, where they admire the ſuperior orders of angels without envy, and love them without jealouſy; but the moſt bleſſed thing will be the viſion and enjoyment of God, the firſt ſource of beauty, and the fountain of infinite joy.

From all this it appears, that the primary notion of God's goodneſs to mankind is, that he has made them moral agents, given them a good meaſure of light and knowledge, and a freedom of will, by means of which they are capable of acting virtuouſly, and of attaining happineſs; for virtue is the indiſpenſable condition on which happineſs will be granted. Man is an imperfect creature, but does not ſink into an utter incapacity for virtue at

once, or by a ſingle indulgence of ſin: ſo long therefore as there are any hopes of his returning to duty, God waits to be gracious to him; while he can and will repent, God will forgive. But on the contrary, he may, and often does plunge ſo deep in ſin, and cheriſh the habits of it ſo long, that it is morally impoſſible for him to forſake it; when this is the caſe, God turns away his face from him, and leaves him to the deſtruction he has brought upon himſelf. Theſe are the fixed and unchangeable bounds of the divine mercy. Pardon is offered, in order to excite the penitent to amend his life, but not to encourage the obdurate in his impiety.

We are not to think that the divine mercy is like that temper in man, which we call pity, that melts to ſee any perſon in miſery, whether he has deſerved it or not. For though this be a real beauty in the human frame, as it tends by an inſtinctive force to ſtir men up to the ſuccour of the miſerable, in order to relieve their

own pain; yet it is in itſelf but a weakneſs. The miniſters of juſtice reſtrain this natural tenderneſs, in condemning malefactors to death, or other grievous puniſhments, and yet they are blameleſs. To think that the Deity may be overcome with the ſighs, the tears, and complainings of thoſe who are abandoned to wickedneſs and incurably evil, is highly derogatory to the purity, the holineſs, and perfection of his nature, and therefore muſt be a very groundleſs notion.

In a few words, all God's moral perfections conſiſt in rectitude, in acting perpetually according to the truth, nature and reaſon of things. But what more common, than for men to bewilder themſelves in ſearching for the boundaries between divine juſtice and goodneſs? By the one, is generally underſtood a communication of bleſſings; by the other, an infliction of judgments and calamities. As if God were not equally righteous in both diſpenſations: if doing that which is right and reaſonable and fit towards his creatures, be moral

goodneſs in the Deity, as ſurely it muſt; then his goodneſs is as conſpicuous in one caſe as in the other.

While the melancholy and the ſuperſtitious ſhrink and tremble at the apprehenſions of God's juſtice, how apt is the ſanguine and impenitent ſinner to flatter himſelf with I know not what hopes from his infinite mercy; whereas, if the true rule and principle of the divine conduct was duly conſidered by them, the one would find no cauſe for his preſumption, nor the other for their fears.

Let the conſideration of this divine attribute inſpire us with the ſincereſt love, the moſt lively affection towards our great Creator, our conſtant Preſerver from evil and deſtruction, our Redeemer from ſin and miſery. As his power and juſtice ſhould awaken our fear and reverence, ſo his goodneſs, if well attended to, muſt raiſe in us the moſt rational ſentiments of love. And love will be of a more laſting influence, to keep us obedient to the divine will,

will, than fear can be. While the judgments of God are upon us, and his ſcourge is waving over our heads, we are apt indeed to tremble before him, and willing to learn righteouſneſs; but when we learn it only from this motive, we ſeldom perſevere in the habit of it, when our apprehenſions of puniſhment are gone. On the contrary, when the goodneſs of God leads us to repentance, when a ſenſe of his benefits draws us with the cords of a man, there is good reaſon to hope that our virtue will continue, becauſe the benefits that produce it, continue too. Becauſe he holdeth our ſoul in life, our footſteps ſhall not ſlip from his paths; becauſe he reacheth forth the arms of his mercy towards us in the pardon of our ſins, we will not be ſo obdurate as not to accept it.

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SERMON XIII.

On the Divine Goodneſs in the Remiſſion of Sin.

PSALM XXV. 11.

For thy name's ſake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.

IN theſe words the Pſalmiſt intreats God to forgive his ſin, for his name's ſake, or for his own glory. And what greater glory can there be to the Supreme Being, than to ſnatch a ſinner from the jaws of deſtruction, and to number him with the ſons of God; to raiſe him from the dregs of miſery and pollution, to true and habitual righteouſneſs, and, in conſequence of that, to eternal bleſſedneſs. We think it a great thing to deliver a poor mortal, like ourſelves, from want and wretchedneſs, and to put him, or to help him to put himſelf into a tolerable ſubſiſtence, which may laſt but

but for a few years. Greater glory we have not than this, except we can "reſcue a ſinner from the evil of his way, and deliver a ſoul from death." But though we may be the humble means of bringing the wicked to repentance, yet it is God who forgives; it is he who cleanſes them from ſin, it is he who conſtitutes the bliſs of glorified natures, of everlaſting intelligences. Mercy, as it is on earth the moſt godlike perfection of which the heart of man is capable, ſo it is in heaven the very crown of all the bleſſed attributes in the eternal power and godhead.

All the works of creation declare the riches of the divine bounty, all the diſpenſations of providence ſpeak him propitious and gracious to all but the wilful and daring ſinner, and long-ſuffering and patient even towards him.

And thoſe ſeeds of charity and mercy, of generoſity and goodneſs, which he has ſown in human nature, ſufficiently inſtruct us what perfections enrich and adorn the

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divine mind. Nor is this notion of God leſs conſonant to revelation than it is to reaſon; when Moſes deſired to ſee the glory of God, "the Lord paſſed by, and proclaimed himſelf The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abundant in goodneſs and truth, forgiving iniquities, tranſgreſſion and ſin." And in the text, "For thy name's ſake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great."

Not that we are to ſuppoſe the greatneſs of the ſin an inducement with God to pardon it; but it is therefore mentioned as having the more need of pardon, and becauſe, though the ſin might be great, yet the mercy of God was ſtill greater.

We can hardly ſuppoſe that an offender will apply for forgiveneſs, unleſs he be deſirous to repent; nor will that forgiveneſs be extended to him, unleſs he does actually repent. When this was the caſe, when they were really and ſincerely penitent, the greateſt of ſinners have found mercy.

mercy. David, the author of the pſalm, even after the dreadful crimes of adultery and murder, was not conſigned over to deſpair, but lived to "bleſs God for all his benefits, who forgave all his ſin and healed all his infirmities, who ſaved his ſoul from deſtruction, and crowned him with mercy and loving-kindneſs." Manaſſeh, who had been a great idolater, and had drawn Judah into the ſame tranſgreſſion, who for his abominable iniquities was carried captive to Babylon, who was not worthy to behold the height of heaven, for the multitude of his ſins; yet when, in ſincere repentance, he addreſſed himſelf to him whoſe anger is inſupportable, but his merciful promiſe immeaſurable and unſearchable; then God, who is the God of them that repent, ſhewed all his goodneſs to him, and ſaved him though unworthy, according to his great mercy.

Mary Magdalen, out of whom were caſt ſeven devils, who was confeſſedly and notoriouſly a ſinner, yet, upon her faith, which worked by love, and was made perfect

fect by charity, found a moſt free pardon and cordial acceptance with her Saviour. Her ſins, "which were many, were forgiven her, for ſhe loved much."

And Saint Peter, (to name no more) the warm and affectionate apoſtle, though forewarned by Chriſt of his danger, yet preſuming upon his own ſtrength, throwing himſelf in the way of temptation, and mixing with infectious company in the high-prieſt's hall, denied his Saviour, denied him in his own preſence, denied him with oaths and imprecations. Yet our bleſſed Lord gave him a look reminding him of his duty, a look of compaſſion for his ſin; and Peter retired into a ſolitary place, to give vent to his grief and bitter anguiſh; there he laid the foundation of that repentance which afterwards grew into a glorious building; there he reſolved to become, and afterwards did really become, one of the greateſt champions of that Jeſus whom he had denied.

I mention theſe inſtances to excite in many among us, who really may be great ſinners,

ſinners, comfortable hopes of becoming better; to produce in them godly ſorrow available to ſalvation, and ſuch "a repentance as need not be repented of." And I deſire you will particularly obſerve, that the perſons I have mentioned, who after great crimes, met with a gracious and abundant pardon, repented in good time, while their faculties were equal to the great work, while their ſubſequent behaviour might aſcertain the ſincerity of their turning to God, and did not defer it till ſickneſs or age had enfeebled them, till their feet ſtumbled upon the dark mountains, and death was laying his cold hand upon them. Alas! what can it then avail to groan in anguiſh of ſpirit for thoſe ſins, which poſſibly they would, but can no longer practiſe; what can it avail to cry mightily to that God, whom they had forgotten days without number, whoſe commands they had neglected, and whoſe ordinances they had deſpiſed.

But we who are better inclined, muſt remember our Creator long before ſuch

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an unhappy period; and in order that we may do it more effectually, let us dwell a little longer, (as the text directs us) on the conſideration of the divine goodneſs and mercy, which (one would think) might have power to ſoften the moſt obdurate.

That God deſires not the ruin, but the reformation and happineſs of a ſinner, is a truth founded in the divine nature. This cuts off all temptation to deſpair, in all but ſuch who are not only wicked, but reſolve to continue ſo; for who that will repent, can deſpair, when he is ſure that the mercy of God is as boundleſs as his majeſty? But is not God holy as well as gracious, is he not juſt as well as merciful? and may not theſe attributes as eaſily diſcourage as the other invite the ſinner? I anſwer, that the juſtice and holineſs of God ought indeed to be a terror to the wicked, but not to the penitent. They behold obſtinacy with a threatening aſpect, but repentance with a mild and propitious one. For, from the holineſs of God an

humble penitent may ſafely infer, that "when he ceaſes to do evil," he ceaſes to be the object of God's wrath, and when "he learns to do well," he becomes the object of his favour. Wherever God gives his grace to ſanctify a ſinner, never will mercy be wanting to pardon him; "for the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs," and cannot hate him that is transformed into his own image, and made partaker of the divine nature. Let no man therefore deſpair of mercy, becauſe of the holineſs and juſtice of God, unleſs he deſpairs of being ever able to change his life and to forſake his ſins. And no man can deſpair of this, if he conſiders that God is a holy God; for from hence we may, and muſt infer, that he hath a zeal for holineſs, and therefore will be ever ready to aſſiſt the endeavours of a returning ſinner after virtue, and promote his converſion by the aid of his Spirit; which is our Saviour's own argument: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more ſhall your heavenly Father give his holy Spirit to them that aſk him?"

And what can be inſuperable to ſincere and reſolved endeavours, ſupported and fortified by the Spirit, "the power of God."

If we look into the goſpel, we find mercy there in its meridian glory. This unfolds to the world the treaſures of the divine love and compaſſion, it diſperſes whatever doubts and fears the contemplation of God's juſtice and holineſs would otherwiſe have raiſed, even in the humble, in the penitent, and the moſt perfect of men.

It ſhews us how it comes to paſs, that through the ſacrifice of the blood of Chriſt, the great governor of the world is at liberty to extend the riches of his mercy to all but the obſtinate, without any derogation to his juſtice, or any diminution of the majeſty of his government, or authority of his laws. In one word, the goſpel breathes nothing but pardon to the penitent; this was what John the Baptiſt, this was what Chriſt himſelf preached, and this was what he gave in commiſſion to

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his apoſtles, even "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt," and all this in order to the remiſſion of ſin and eternal life.

But notwithſtanding all that has been ſaid and done under the Old Teſtament and the New, to aſſure ſuch as will repent, of God's readineſs to pardon them; yet in ſome, the greatneſs of their guilt, or the artifice of their ſpiritual enemies, diſorders their underſtanding, and ſtaggers their faith. And it is not unuſual to meet with ſuch doubts and deſpondences as theſe; "I am willing to repent, I earneſtly deſire to do ſo; but will God be reconciled to ſuch a ſinner as I am? will he beſtow his grace upon one who has ſo often received it in vain, on one who has ſo often deſpiſed his word, and quenched his Spirit?" To ſuch a one I anſwer, If the greatneſs of thy ſins affright thee, there never was ſure a greater than the crucifixion of the Son of God, and yet even for that was repentance accepted. When being convinced and wounded to the heart, they cried out

to Peter and the reſt of the apoſtles, "Men and brethren, what ſhall we do?" Even to theſe Saint Peter addreſſeth himſelf, in words that breathe nothing but the conſolations and promiſes of the goſpel, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, for the remiſſion of ſins, and ye ſhall receive the gift of the Holy Ghoſt."

It remains then, that mercy knows no other bounds but this one; it gives place to juſtice, when man is incapable of reaping any good from the long-ſuffering and patience of God.

And now having at large ſet before you the mercies of the Lord, methinks I might reaſonably expect that they ſhould operate upon you, that there ſhould be no ſoul ſo obdurate as to reſiſt the goodneſs of God. Some there are, who are hardened even by judgments, and become callous under affliction; and ſome one among a thouſand of thoſe who have lived like infidels, may brave the terrors of death,

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and glory even in dying hard: but ſurely the warm beams of the divine clemency, the gracious influences of God's loving-kindneſs, ſhould melt even the moſt inſenſible into gratitude.

Let us then conſider with what long-ſuffering God has waited for our reformation, how he has reprieved us from day to day, and from year to year; how often we have entered upon vows and reſolutions of a better obedience, and how ill they have been performed hitherto; and let the goodneſs of God have it's proper effect upon us, let it "lead us to repentance." Then, "though our ſins have been as ſcarlet, they ſhall be white as ſnow; though they have been red like crimſon, they ſhall be as wool."

SERMON XIV.

Thoughts on the Chriſtian Redemption.

TITUS ii. 14.

Who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

THE great ſubject of our wonder and love in the redemption of man is, that the Son of God vouchſafed to give himſelf for us. Had he ſent us an angel only, one of thoſe miniſters of his court, who hear his wiſdom, and ſee his glory, with a meſſage of reconciliation to mankind, this would have been an act of grace which we ought to have thankfully acknowledged.

But ſuch is the purity and holineſs of God, and ſo heinous a thing is ſin, that it

it ſeems the Deity abhors it to the ſame degree that he loves his only-begotten Son. It would have been a ſtain upon his juſtice, as well as a means to bring his laws into contempt, if he had forgiven our ſins without due ſatisfaction made him for the diſhonour they have done his dignity, and his ſacred authority.

But no angel could have offered him an atonement precious enough to remove his diſpleaſure, and recover his favour to ſuch malefactors as we are. It is much to be queſtioned, whether he could have prevailed with us to ſet about our repentance, ſince the beſt argument for that, is the aſſured hopes of pardon, which no angel could have beſtowed; or if he could have induced us to repent, yet how could he have cancelled our obligation to puniſhment for our paſt ſins? The doing our duty now is a preſent debt; and the paying of one debt cannot make amends for the non-performance of another.

It was therefore the mediation of the Son of God alone, the interpoſition of a perſon of infinite dignity in our behalf, that could reſcue us from miſery, and reſtore us to a ſtate of grace and bleſſedneſs. He only could make a full and ſufficient ſacrifice for our tranſgreſſions, and give his Father an equivalent for that ſalvation which he offers the world. For in conſequence of his incarnation, and the union of the divine nature with the human, every thing he tranſacted for us received an addition of infinite value; and though he ſuffered as man, yet he made his oblation for our ſins, and offered the price of redemption to the Father, as God.

Thoſe therefore that are ſincerely penitent, and really lead a new life, need no longer deſpair for the number or blackneſs of their crimes, ſince they have the merits of Jeſus Chriſt, and the all-powerful interceſſion of God the Son, to make their peace, and enſure their acceptance.

But though the price that Chriſt hath paid for our redemption is ſufficient, ſtill

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it was great mercy and grace in the Father to accept it; for he might juſtly have refuſed all overtures of reconciliation, and have left us to the deſtruction which we had brought upon ourſelves.

Should it not then imprint upon us the greateſt reverence for God, the moſt awful ſenſe of the ſupreme obligation of his laws, and the moſt effectual hatred and horror for ſin, to conſider that no leſs an expiation for it was allowed than the blood of the Son of God? Should it not make us tremble at our eſcape (if we do eſcape) to think that nothing but an almighty hand could ſnatch us from the ruin which hung over our heads? Should it not raiſe our love and gratitude to the higheſt pitch, that when we lay in the moſt forlorn condition, and no other eye pitied us, no other friend was able to ſuccour us, our bleſſed Saviour condeſcended, out of his great affection for our ſouls, and deſire of our happineſs, to give himſelf for us?

For us, who had corrupted our way before him, who had loſt the reliſh for virtue,

virtue, and our original aſpirings after heaven, and were ſunk in earthly things; for us who had forgotten the principles of a ſpiritual life, and were "dead in treſpaſſes and ſins;" for us who were ſo far from applying to him for his aſſiſtance, that we could never have conceived ſo ſtupendous a mercy, had not he himſelf revealed and perfected it; for us who had withdrawn our allegiance from our Maker, had revolted to his adverſary, and taken part with our own deſtroyer.

"Scarcely for a righteous man (ſaith the apoſtle) would one die; but peradventure for a good man," for a generous, a kind and charitable man "ſome friend would even dare to die. But herein was the love of God magnified towards us, that while we were enemies to him by wicked works, Chriſt died for us." Many have devoted their lives in the ſervice of their country, or for the ſake of perſons particularly dear to them, but to die for enemies is a height of charity which no mere man ever attained:

ed: this was the perfection, the crown of goodneſs left for the Son of God.

And what ſhould further endear this benevolence of our Lord to us, is, that he paſt the fallen angels by, and left them to the blackneſs of darkneſs for ever, creatures that had filled more exalted ſtations, and had been poſſeſt of greater endowments and capacities than we; but he took compaſſion upon fallen man, nay he even took upon him human nature, and became our merciful high-prieſt, being "touched with a fellow-feeling of our infirmities, and both able and willing to ſuccour thoſe that are tempted, ſince he himſelf was alſo tempted in all points as we are, but without ſin."

He has not only redeemed us from the guilt and puniſhment of ſin, but from the dominion of it; not only "blotted out the hand-writing that was againſt us, nailing it to his croſs," but purchaſed for us the Holy Spirit, to dwell in and to purify our hearts: "for this purpoſe was the Son of

God manifeſted, that he might deſtroy the works of the devil, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works:" we are no longer to ſuffer ſin to reign in our mortal bodies, becauſe we are bought with a price; but we muſt "glorify God in our body, and in our ſpirit, which are God's." As if the apoſtle had ſaid, Beſides the duty we owe to God as our Creator and preſerver, he has acquired a ſtill ſtronger right, as he is our Redeemer; and we ſhall now be more inexcuſably guilty, if we rob him of that by an injurious defection, which is on many accounts ſo juſtly his own.

From theſe paſſages of ſcripture therefore it appears, that we have no farther title to the former part of Chriſt's redemption, namely, a deliverance from eternal miſery, and a reverſionary inheritance in heaven, than as we have a ſhare in the latter, "in being redeemed from all iniquity, and living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in the preſent world." In vain may we pretend to be "his peculiar people," in vain may we call

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him "Lord, Lord," if we do not the things which he commands. How vainly do we attempt to deceive God, or rather how fatally do we deceive ourſelves, in pretending to be his ſervants, and to have the greateſt veneration for that holy religion he has planted in the world, while we wilfully and habitually diſobey him?

Whatever honourable name men may give us, whatever we may pleaſe to profeſs or call ourſelves, we are no farther chriſtians than as we ſincerely, though not perfectly, keep the commandments of Chriſt. Infirmities and frailties indeed we ſhall ſtill have; but unleſs we walk with an honeſt heart before him, unleſs we endeavour with all our might to refine ourſelves from the droſs of ſin, and cultivate every grace and virtue of the goſpel, we are by no means of Chriſt's fold.

Accordingly, we find that in the primitive church, as ſoon as any perſon was guilty of a crime, of a great and ſcandalous offence, he was immediately cut off

from the communion of it: nor was he reſtored till by his ſubſequent behaviour he had given good proofs of his contrition and repentance. And in thoſe early days when chriſtianity was not the eſtabliſhed religion, but perſecuted by the reigning powers, few embraced it but out of reaſons of conviction and a real deſign to act up to their profeſſion. Theſe things preſerved the church a long time almoſt univerſally pure.

Such ſhining lights in the world were chriſtians then, ſuch excellent patterns of ſobriety and purity, of probity and meekneſs, of piety and fortitude, that their religion propagated itſelf far and wide, notwithſtanding the corruptions and malice of evil men.

But when honour and profit flowed into the church, men began to receive the faith of Chriſt out of a view to ſecular advantages, and the zeal and holineſs of former times abated: for men that want moral honeſty, and are really of no religion at all, will always profeſs themſelves of that which

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is in faſhion, and thereby do it no little diſhonour. According to the prophetic parables of our Lord, which repreſent the church under the figure of "a net which was caſt into the ſea, and gathered fiſhes of many kinds, ſome good and ſome bad," and of "a field," in which, though good ſeed was only ſown, yet tares grow up with the wheat promiſcuouſly. But when the Lord of the harveſt ſhall come, the angels who are his reapers, ſhall ſeparate the tares from the wheat, the falſe profeſſors from the good chriſtians, and they will gather the wheat only into their Lord's garner.

At preſent the tares are ſuffered to grow up with the wheat, leſt if they be rooted up, the wheat ſhould be damaged by it: The intereſts of the righteous and the wicked are ſo complicated and blended here, either by relation or blood, or by the intercourſe of buſineſs, that if the wicked were deſtroyed in this world, the innocent would often ſuffer along with them. Beſides,

ſides, if ſuch grievous puniſhments as bad men deſerve, ſhould always preſently overtake them in this life, the earth would become ſuch a ſcene of horror as to be unfit for men of tender and merciful diſpoſitions to live in.

For this reaſon as well as for many others, the regular diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments is reſerved for a future day. The pale of the church is now ſo wide, and the depravity of the times ſo great, that eccleſiaſtical cenſures cannot be ſo ſtrictly executed as they were in the infancy of chriſtianity without more harm than benefit. But though all notoriouſly bad men and hypocrites are not at preſent ſeparated from the ſociety of the church, this will but little avail them; ſince without an effectual reformation of their lives, they will certainly be excluded from the kingdom of heaven, and the company "of juſt men made perfect:" when their compaſſionate Saviour himſelf, who ſhed his blood to redeem them, ſhall ſay even to thoſe that have eaten and drank in his preſence, and propheſied and work-

worked miracles in his name, but obeyed not the truth, "Depart from me, I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity."

To no purpoſe may men hope to be ſaved by relying on the merits of Chriſt alone, or by faith without good works. For Chriſt did not die that we might not repent, but that we might repent and be accepted. He will perform his part of the covenant, and make good his promiſe of ſalvation to us; but it is upon condition of our doing our part, and we muſt be "zealous of good works," before we can be holy, before we can be happy. He will ſend his Holy Spirit to comfort and aſſiſt us in our pilgrimage, but then we muſt co-operate with him, and with his good motions. We ſhall enter into our Maſter's joy, but not without ſubmitting to his righteous commands. "If ye love me (ſaith he) keep my commandments; and if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them."

When it is ſaid that "we ſhall be ſaved by believing on Jeſus Chriſt;" by believ-

ing on him is meant a receiving him in all his offices, as our prophet to inſtruct and lead us in the right way, as our prieſt to make an atonement for our ſins, and as our king to rule and govern us. An ill life is a virtual infidelity, a denying in our deeds what we pretend in our words. Self flattery is the moſt general ſource of ſin; a ſaying "we ſhall proſper, though we walk in the imagination of our own hearts," a groundleſs ſoftening of our guilt, and excuſing it to ourſelves: for it is not eaſy to commit any great ſin with true and ſtrong impreſſions of our duty and its ſanctions, upon our minds.

Wherefore let us in well-doing look with comfort for "that bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf, a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

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SERMON XV.

The Qualities of Chriſt as Mediator and Redeemer.

COLOSSIANS i. 14.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveneſs of ſins.

ST. Paul begins this epiſtle with a commendation of the Coloſſians for their fruitfulneſs under the means of grace, for their faith in Chriſt Jeſus, which was a principle of holineſs in them, and for the love which they bore to all the ſaints. And theſe things, he tells us, were grounded upon no variable or uncertain foundation, but upon the hope which was laid up for them in heaven. And therefore with the moſt ſincere piety he prays, "that they might ſtill continue to increaſe in divine knowledge, and to grow in all the virtues of

the goſpel, and graces of the ſpirit; being ſtrengthened with all might according to his glorious power." Then in a ſublime, but unaffected ſtrain of devotion, which nothing but true religion can inſpire, he pays his acknowledgments to God, the author of "ſo great ſalvation" to him and them, and to all mankind: He gives thanks unto the Father, "who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light." Who by calling us to faith and repentance and a new obedience, hath fitted us for the ſociety of pure ſpirits, and the happineſs of heaven; hath delivered us from the power of darkneſs, from the reign of idolatry, and the many vices and brutal luſts that prevailed in the world before the coming of our Saviour; and hath tranſlated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveneſs of ſins." A ſufficient ranſom is paid, and his ſacrifice of atonement is accepted for the ſins of the whole world. The benefit of that meritorious ſacrifice ſhall indeed be placed only to the account of ſuch as obey him; for he did

did not come to ſave us in our ſins, (our great and crying ſins, I mean,) but from our ſins; he will deliver us from the puniſhment of them, on condition that we do our part, to deliver ourſelves from their dominion. A pardon is proclaimed under the ſeal of his Blood to tranſgreſſors of the divine laws, and rebels againſt the divine authority, not to ſuch as reſolve ſtill to continue ſo, but to thoſe that are penitent, and willing to return to duty. However, in his deſire and deſign the extent of the redemption is general; "he would have all men be ſaved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." He hath laid down a price equivalent to ſo great a purchaſe, even his precious blood; and if we will not make good our title to it by conforming to the eaſy terms he has propoſed, our blood is upon our own heads, and it is our own fault that we periſh.

And leſt any of us ſhould be inclined to doubt of the veracity of this meſſage, and the certainty of this ſalvation, the apoſtle proceeds to inform us, that Chriſt our me-

diator was an agent every way equal to ſo great a work, ſince "he is the image of the inviſible God, the firſt-born of every creature." In vain would the Socinians argue from theſe words, that our Saviour was a creature and born, and conſequently not God: for the words are to be underſtood of the eternal generation of the ſecond perſon in the bleſſed trinity before all ages and all creatures: beſides, to be the "firſt-born," or to be made the firſt-born, in ſcripture language very often implies only ſovereignty and dominion. This appears plainly from that remarkable paſſage in the lxxxix Pſalm, where God is introduced ſaying of David, (who there and in many other places is a type of Chriſt) "Alſo I will make him my firſt-born, higher than the kings of the earth." For if we take the words literally, it is not true that David was the firſt-born of God. The true meaning is this, that David was particularly dear to God, and by him made a ſovereign prince over many kings and nations. And by parity of reaſon, here, after my text, when it is ſaid that "Chriſt is the

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firſt-born of every creature," it does not ſignify that he is a creature, but that he is the ruler and Lord of all creatures.

Had our Saviour been merely a creature (as the adverſaries of our faith would have him to be) he could not have merited forgiveneſs nor ſalvation, at the hands of God for us. For no created being can merit happineſs for others. The greater abilities any creature is veſted with, and the more exalted virtues it is poſſeſſed of, the more it is indebted to God who gave them. So far is it from being able to claim any thing for others from him, that it owes all that it has to his bounty and favour. If God ſhould command the moſt innocent man upon earth to lay down his life, it would be his duty to do ſo, but he could merit nothing by it: and if he ſhould pretend to do it uncommanded, it would be a vain and raſh preſumption in him. Since therefore Chriſt has paid the price of our redemption, has bought us with his blood, and procured eternal ſalvation for us, he certainly muſt be God as well as man, otherwiſe, he could

not have accompliſhed ſo great an undertaking, but would have been baffled and defeated by the powers of darkneſs, in attempting to redeem a world. And that he actually is God, is very evident from what immediately follows in this ſame chapter. "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, viſible and inviſible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things conſiſt." We need not doubt, in the leaſt, of his divinity, becauſe he produced all things out of nothing; becauſe he is not only the Firſt Cauſe, but all things were made "for him" as their chief end, *i.e.* for his glory; and becauſe he ſtill continues to uphold the world in being and good order by his power and providence, for "by him all things conſiſt."

Now, this is our great comfort, and full aſſurance of faith, our glory and triumph, that he who has redeemed us with his blood, he who has publiſhed glad tidings of pardon,

don, upon our repentance, and he who has promiſed to aſſiſt us in working out our ſalvation by the mighty power of the Spirit, is God. We are therefore ſecure that our hopes will not be fruſtrated, nor our expectation cut off; but if we be faithful to the holy covenant made in his blood, he will moſt aſſuredly keep and perform his part of it. He will purge the penitent ſoul from all the ſtains of corruption, and beſtow a crown of everlaſting felicity upon his righteous and good ſervants.

Our Saviour had ſomething of his own wherewith to redeem us (which no mere creature can have); he was able out of his own ſtock, to make a valuable compenſation to the offended juſtice of his Father; he had "power to lay down his life, and he had power to take it again." As God, indeed, he neither did, nor could ſuffer any thing; he ſuffered as man; but then the union of the divine nature with the human, added infinite luſtre and value to whatever he did or ſuffered in it. In his office of our Mediator and Redeemer, he

acted as both God and man; and therefore, though he ſuffered as man, he made his offering to the firſt perſon in the bleſſed Trinity, as God. Even in temporal affairs, the dignity of the perſon always enhances the weight of a mediation; ſo the interpoſition of a king will be accepted, where that of a private man would not be regarded. And in ſcripture, the merit of Chriſt's ſacrifice is frequently aſcribed to the dignity of his godhead. So Heb. ix. 14. "How much more ſhall the blood of Chriſt, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himſelf without ſpot to God, purge your conſcience from dead works to ſerve the living God." "Who being the brightneſs of the Father's glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon, and upholding all things by the word of his power, purged (or expiated) our ſins." And in another place, he charges the elders of Epheſus "to feed the church of God, which he hath purchaſed with his own blood." Thus "God was in Chriſt, reconciling the world to himſelf."

Perhaps it will be ſaid, How could the merits of Chriſt be imputed to us, and our iniquities be laid upon him? am I any better man for what another ſuffers for me? or if I commit a ſin, can another be guilty for me, and I be clear?

Here it muſt be confeſſed (nor need we diſſemble it) that perſonal merit or demerit cannot be transferred, righteouſneſs or guilt cannot be ſhifted from one to another; but the reward of virtue, or the puniſhment of ſin, may certainly be transferred from one to another, without any abſurdity or breach of juſtice, provided it be done with the conſent of each party concerned, and provided the perſon who ſuffers for us, or makes over his reward to us, has a good right and power ſo to do. And why might not our Lord do this? why might he not do what he would with his own, with what he was originally poſſeſſed of, and with what he had earned ſo dear? He ſaw us lie forlorn and hopeleſs in our ſins, and obnoxious to eternal miſery; he was willing to relieve us; he propoſed to his Father to take upon him our

fleſh,

fleſh, to ſhew therein a pattern of perfect goodneſs, and to ſuffer a painful and ignominious death, in order to atone for our ſins, to reſcue us from their unhappy conſequences, and open a way to life and immortality, to as many as ſhould believe and repent. The Father freely accepted this overture, and for this valuable conſideration forgave the paſt ſins of the penitent, remitted their puniſhment, and promiſed them an inheritance in glory, for the ſake of his well-beloved Son. Where is there any thing in all this that claſhes with equity or reaſon?

It muſt be acknowledged, that God cannot eſteem us more, or look upon us to be better than we are on account of what his Son has done, but ſtill he may regard us with an eye of greater favour and kindneſs on that account. We muſt "bring forth fruits meet for repentance," and do works worthy of our holy faith, before it will avail us. But then we are to conſider, that Chriſt has done every thing conſiſtent with the liberty of our will, to bring us to that repentance,

repentance, and that purity of life and heart. We are to conſider alſo, that, whereas it was not certain, before the ſatisfaction of Chriſt, whether God would pardon the ſins of men upon repentance, or not (ſince he might juſtly require a ſincere obedience through the whole courſe of a man's life, for the time paſt, as well as the time to come, for obedience in one period could not ſupply the want of it in another): now forgiveneſs of our ſins, through the blood of Chriſt, is aſſured to our faith, upon returning to our duty and allegiance to him, though our tranſgreſſions have been of ever ſo deep a dye, or ever ſo long continued.

In the mean time, God did not want goodneſs and mercy, to have forgiven us without any price of redemption, but it was not conſiſtent with his wiſdom to do ſo. Had he proclaimed a free pardon to penitent ſinners, without any mark of his diſpleaſure againſt ſin, without any ſatisfaction made to his authority as a lawgiver, or his juſtice as a judge, this would have

have tempted men to continue in ſin, as thinking he had not much averſion to it, and to hope an eaſy compromiſe with him, notwithſtanding, at laſt. But now, when he does not forgive even ſuch as forſake their ſins, but on account of the blood of Chriſt; when they ſee ſo much innocence and majeſty ſuffer ſo ſeverely in their ſtead; when they ſee themſelves delivered by an expedient ſo amazing as the death of the Son of God; it muſt certainly inſpire them with the higheſt reverence for the divine laws, the greateſt horror for ſin, the ſtrongeſt reluctance to cloſe with a temptation, and the warmeſt gratitude for their dear Redeemer, whom they have coſt ſo much, whoſe ſide their iniquities have pierced, and whoſe heart their tranſgreſſions have wounded. Surely no allurements of gain or pleaſure, nor any terrors of pain, ſhould draw us from our duty, when it appears that God hates ſin even as much as he loves his only-begotten Son.

It was an eſtabliſhed principle among the Jews, that "without ſhedding of blood there was no remiſſion," and accordingly they offered the blood of bulls and goats, which could not take away ſins, nor had any profit in it, any farther than as it was a type and reſemblance of the ſacrifice of Chriſt: the ſame opinion, that the Deity was not to be propitiated without ſacrifice, which was to bear a puniſhment in the room of the offender, obtained among the heathen, inſomuch, that they often ſacrificed their ſons and daughters, and "gave their firſtborn for their tranſgreſſion, the fruit of their body for the ſin of their ſoul." At once therefore to take away this unnatural cuſtom and impious rite, and to provide a ſufficient oblation and ſatisfaction once for all, he was pleaſed "to give his own Son for a propitiation for our ſins, who is able to ſave to the uttermoſt them that come unto God by him, ſince he ever liveth to make interceſſion for us." "But now, once in the end of the world, (ſaith the apoſtle to the Hebrews) *i. e.* in the

the laſt age, or diſpenſation of the goſpel, hath Chriſt appeared to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf."

Conſidering the infinite greatneſs, the majeſty and innocence of his perſon, it may properly enough be ſaid, that none of the ſons of men ever endured ſuch great and undeſerved ſufferings as our Lord.

But here will ſome ſay, Was not this a more heinous thing, a greater outrage upon virtue and innocence, than all the human ſacrifices that were ever offered, that the holy, harmleſs, and undefiled Son of God, ſhould die for a number of guilty wretches, who did not thank him for it? We anſwer, That it was no outrage, no heinous thing, becauſe it was done with his own conſent; he voluntarily ſubmitted to it, and choſe it, for the ſake of a greater good, viz. to deliver innumerable ſouls from death, to provide for the eternal welfare of a world; and that he might, in his human nature, be exalted to the right-hand of God, there to be the protector and governor of the church,

church, and its judge at the laſt day. An action productive of ſo much happineſs, cannot but be moral and virtuous, and good in the higheſt degree. In the mean time it was ſo ordered, that the life of our Lord ſhould be taken by the hands of wicked men, who were anſwerable for their crime, God being able to bring good out of evil, and taking occaſion by the villainy of men, to forward the gracious purpoſes of his providence.

Laſtly, It is objected that the ſufficiency of Chriſt's ſacrifice cannot conſiſt with the freedom of the divine grace, for if it was ſufficient, he was obliged to accept it. And yet we are ſaid to be "ſaved and juſtified freely." To this I reply in one word, How was God obliged to admit it? Certainly only by his own grace and mercy. He could, if he had pleaſed, have left us to periſh in the deſtruction which we had brought upon ourſelves, and allowed of no reconciliation with, or atonement for us. Where one ſuffers inſtead of another, the conſent of the legiſlator or magiſtrate,

muſt always be had before it can be valid. Beſides, this ſacrifice was of God's own providing, "for God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life."

Wherever the Deity is concerned indeed, we muſt not expect fully to comprehend the method of counſel, and ſeries of action. Let angels deſire to look into the great myſtery of the incarnation and paſſion of the Son of God; let us be content with the moſt profound humility to adore, and with the greateſt gratitude to enjoy the benefit of it.

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SERMON XVI.

On the Death of Chriſt.

JOHN xix. 30.

It is finiſhed!

THE importance and accompliſhment of our redemption; the ſacred offices and ſufferings of the Meſſiah; and the reſtoration of fallen man, are ſubjects of which human eloquence can give no adequate deſcription. After all its enquiries, the mind is ſtill left ſuſpended in ſilent adoration. Nor is the glorious myſtery alone ſuperior to human comprehenſion; angels, immortal and exalted beings, have viewed with concern and aſtoniſhment, the ſcene; the ſcene that preſented the favoured of the Almighty, and the Son of his immortal and invariable love, in the periſhable form of

human exiſtence, expoſed to miſery, and ſubject to death.

How replete with wonders is the ſcheme of chriſtian ſalvation! That he who fills immeaſurable ſpace ſhould aſſume a limited being. That the parent of univerſal nature ſhould taſte the anguiſh of a mortal diſſolution, and periſh by the hands of thoſe whoſe beings he gave and ſupported! Was it that the eternal Son of the Father was commanded, was it that he was neceſſitated to undertake this taſk? No: crowned with endleſs glory and moſt exalted happineſs, he was far from being obliged to intercede, much leſs to ſuffer for man: his interceſſion was voluntary; his ſufferings were the reſult of his benevolence and compaſſion. When he ſaw that there was none, and wondered that there was no interceſſor: when oblations were no longer acceptable, and burnt-offerings no more a ſacrifice for ſin, then ſaid he, "Lo! I come: I "come to propitiate for offending man, "and will myſelf be the ſacrifice that juſ-"tice demands: if human guilt muſt be

"expiated

" expiated by human blood, behold the
" man! If ſuch an high prieſt is requiſite
" to whom no ſin can be imputed, behold
" the God!"

Thus, as united God and man, the Meſſiah was enabled to make atonement for the ſins of the world. Nor could he otherwiſe have done it. An union of the two natures was indiſpenſably neceſſary for the buſineſs of redemption. As man, he might have ſuffered, but could not ſatisfy the divine juſtice by a perfect obedience to the law of the covenant; as God, he could have ſatisfied, but could not have ſuffered; but as God and man, he was enabled both to ſuffer and to ſatisfy. Theſe ſufferings, and this ſatisfaction, the great eſſentials of chriſtianity, ſhould be well underſtood by thoſe who profeſs that religion, as by which alone they are entitled to ſalvation, and can have acceſs to the divine favour.

The ſubject of this diſcourſe is the laſt words of our Saviour, recorded by his beloved diſciple St. John. He alone remained

by his crucified Lord, when the others had left him through ſorrow or ſhame, and he alone therefore gives the beſt evidence of his dying expreſſions. Accordingly we find no mention of theſe words in any other evangeliſt. They agree in telling us, that previous to his departure, he uttered a deep groan, which was attended with circumſtances of aſtoniſhment and horror. For it was a groan that ſhook the frame of nature, which for a while ſeemed to be departing with its God. "The earth trembled and gave up her dead: the everlaſting rocks burſt, and the vail of the temple was rent in twain." To add to the horrors of an earthquake, there was an "univerſal darkneſs for the ſpace of about three hours." As the children of the bride-chamber mourn when the bridegroom is taken from them, the lights of heaven withdrew their ſhining, and refuſed to ſee the ſufferings of him who clothed them in ſplendor. Such were the phœnomena that attended the expiring Jeſus. Nor were they without a due effect; many who were preſent on the occaſion were converted to belief, and confeſſed the power and

divine

divine miſſion of our Lord. "Verily, ſaid they, this was the Son of God." Indeed, what but the moſt obſtinate infidelity could have reſiſted the voice of truth, when ſo ſtrongly atteſted? But ſuch there were then, whom no evidence could diveſt of their prejudice; nor is it to be wondered at, for ſuch there are now. There are not wanting thoſe who would reſolve the miracles of the Redeemer's life, and the phœnomena of his death, into natural cauſes, and daringly deny the divinity of their author. The eclipſe of the ſun would according to their calculation, have happened at that time, and was only in conſequence of his ordinary revolutions. But theſe aſſertions are not, nor indeed could they be ſtrengthened by any ſufficient evidence.

Happy for the aſſertors and their brethren, if they but had the honeſty of the heathen philoſopher of the Meſſiah's times, who, at the criſis of his death declared, from a conviction that theſe extraordinary appearances were not from natural cauſes, and with great happineſs of conjecture, that

" either the God of nature was ſuffering, or the world was at an end." Such were the wonderful circumſtances of his death, whoſe life was but one continued miracle. And were not theſe more evident proofs of the true Meſſiah, than if he had appeared in all the grandeur of regal dignity? Such an appearance might, indeed, have gratified the vain expectations of phariſaical pride; but phariſaical pride was no object for the kingdom of heaven. The humble ſpirit, the lowly frame of mind, meekneſs and ſelf-denial, were the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtics of the religion of Jeſus. Nothing pompous or vain, nothing of ſplendor or parade, nothing dazzling or amuſive attended the advent of the Lord of nature. Where was the palace to receive the king of Iſrael? What ſplendid bed for the royal infant? Were the domes of majeſty prepared for his reception? Was he uſhered at his birth into the ſplendid pavilions? No: for from his birth " the Son of Man had not where to lay his head." Were the elders of Iſrael aſſembled? Did the princes of the people meet to celebrate the day?

No;

No: but the ſimple ſhepherds were invited; but the ſtars of heaven exulted at his birth; but the hymns of angels confeſſed the God!

Conſiſtent with the ſimple grandeur of his birth was the whole conduct of his life on earth. If we trace him from the cradle to the grave, we may obſerve a divine benevolence in all his actions, and in all his converſation an heavenly ſimplicity. Theſe are the cardinal virtues, the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtics of his religion, and theſe he conſtantly recommended to his diſciples both by precept and example. To "go about doing good," was the ſole employment of his life: and when John's diſciples came to enquire of him whether he was the Chriſt, he ſeeks no other argument of his divine miſſion. "Go ye, ſays he, ſhew unto John theſe things--the deaf hear; the blind receive ſight; the lame walk; the lepers are cleanſed; and to the poor the goſpel is preached." That theſe circumſtances were mentioned as much for their charitable as miraculous nature, we may gather from the laſt article, "the goſpel is preached to the poor." Such an argument

gument would have had no effect with rabbinical pride. That, could entertain no opinion of a Meſſiah preaching to publicans and ſinners, or that any good thing could come out of Nazareth. But the Redeemer wanted not the applauſe, only the ſalvation of man.

That ſalvation, by a life exempt from ſin, and a painful death, he effected. Were his ſufferings attended with more than common anguiſh? no wonder! for "he was wounded for our tranſgreſſions." Was his ſoul exceedingly heavy, even unto death? "The Lord had laid on him the iniquities of us all." But not the ſneer of inſult, not the whips of pain, not the thorns of ignominy, nor the terrors of crucifixion, could make him give up the purpoſe of his ſoul, or call one angel to his aid. Determined to die a ſacrifice for his creatures, he ſought not to exculpate himſelf before his accuſers, nor made he any defence that might fruſtrate the end.

He bore with patience the ſport of inſolence, when he could have commanded the

the tongue that ſpoke, to be ſilent for ever. He ſubmitted to the indignity of a crown of thorns, who is now arrayed in ſplendor that cannot be looked upon. The Lord of glory was nailed to an ignominious croſs. Theſe dreadful things he ſuffered, to reconcile us to his Father; and in his laſt words affectionately told us, that "it was finiſhed," told us in his dying accents what ſhould echo through the ſkies. For theſe words are the motto of the chriſtian faith, the baſis of our confidence, and the ſtay of the ſoul. This is the victory that overcometh the world, that takes from ſin and death their power to deſtroy.

With what gratitude ſhould we conſider this amazing inſtance of the divine goodneſs! with what acknowledgment ſhall we repay it! What is it that the Lord requires of us for all his benefits? an humble ſpirit, a grateful remembrance; how ſmall a compoſition for a debt immenſe! And is it poſſible we ſhould refuſe this? ſhall we not, when invited, commemorate his ſufferings, by partaking of

that ſacrament he has inſtituted as a memorial of his merits, to man? Where is the ſpirit of chriſtianity fled? In the early ages of the church, the whole body of a religious aſſembly unanimouſly received the holy communion; no one exception but of notorious profligacy, or uncharitable malice. And are we leſs ready to do this in remembrance of him, of whoſe mediation and ſatisfaction we are equally in need? Let us be aſhamed of the reproachful compariſon; every motive invites us, every engagement calls upon us to the intereſting celebration of the chriſtian ſacrifice. If we hope for acceptance through the merits of Chriſt, if we ſeek forgiveneſs through his propitiation, ſhall we neglect the means he has propoſed, or the ordinances he has inſtituted; would not ſuch a conduct be highly abſurd? Could we hope to be diſtinguiſhed by the favour or protection of an earthly prince, whoſe edicts we obeyed not, and with whoſe injunctions we refuſed to comply? ſurely, no; and is there not a parity of reaſon in the caſe before us? But where truth ſtands

ſelf-evident, what need of argument; what need of reaſoning, to enforce a conduct on which eternal happineſs depends; what other motive is neceſſary, when this is in the caſe?

Other motives however there are. If there be any amiableneſs in virtue, any charms in piety, any excellence in gratitude, theſe loudly call upon us to acknowledge the favours of divine love, and to commemorate the ſufferings of a dying Redeemer. The Romaniſts, whoſe image-adorations we reject, and whoſe ſuperſtitions we diſclaim, defend their uſe of the crucifix, in that it preſents to their minds the ſufferings of their Saviour; though we want not ſuch monitors of devotion, yet ought we not to be leſs induſtrious in meditating on the author and accompliſhment of our redemption. That, ought to be the center to which our thoughts, though through various directions, ſhould for ever tend. That awful, that engaging object, will fill the mind with affecting ideas of his infinite love and perfections; thoſe

thoſe ideas will in the conſequence produce gratitude, and gratitude will engage obedience.

That we may ever moſt effectually expreſs our thankfulneſs for the divine mercies:—That we may perſevere in every holy purpoſe and reſolution, and conform ourſelves to the model of our crucified Saviour:—That the pattern of his piety and devotion, of his humility and charity, of his meekneſs and patient ſuffering, may be ſo lively imprinted on our minds, that we may tranſcribe his example in our lives and converſations:—That, commemorating his all-ſufficient ſacrifice on earth, we may receive the everlaſting benefit of it in his heavenly kingdom, and bleſs and praiſe him to all eternity, may God of his infinite mercy grant!

END OF VOLUME I.